

the **Stand** south side news

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Syracuse, NY

FEBRUARY 2019 **Issue 72** **FREE**

LASTING LOVE

Two South Side couples
share their stories of love
and long-lasting marriage

Fatherhood on the South Side

Emmanuel Flowers shares how he guides his 10 children on life's path

Unknown future

PEACE Inc.'s renewed
program to support
parolees hit with setback

View images captured from
both sides of the globe at
special photo exhibition

Syracuse to South Africa

BLACK HISTORY MONTH



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DEAN LORRAINE BRANHAM AND
BEA GONZALEZ

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KEEPING WITH COMMUNITY STANDARDS.

- FATHERHOOD** | Meet Emmanuel Flowers, a veteran and father of 10 who isn't afraid to challenge traditional gender roles.
- COMMUNITY** | Celebrate Black History Month through film, music, books and crafts at events across Syracuse this month.
- COMMUNITY** | The Family Reunification Grant loses its PEACE Inc. case manager after only two months on the job.
- FEATURES** | Discover the secret to having a long-lasting marriage based on the love stories of two South Side couples.
- COMMUNITY** | Find out who is behind Freedom Commons, a soon to be completed supportive housing project.
- YOUR TOWN, OUR TOWN** | Hear how The Stand's partnership with a community newspaper in South Africa evolved into Photo Walks held on two continents.
- ENTERTAINMENT** | Take a "friendly" five mintues to reflect on notable African-American figures from the past.

■ Cover photography by Ben Cleeton of Twiggy and Aundra Billue. Story on page 10.

CALENDAR | FEBRUARY

What: You Can't Fail Conference 2019
When: 5 to 9 p.m. Friday, Feb. 22, and 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 23
Where: Embassy Suites by Hilton Syracuse Destiny USA, 311 Hiawatha Blvd.
Details: Event to include networking, full-day conference, educational and motivational speakers, workshops, vendors and live music. Topics covered for professional women of color include: Women on boards, financial literacy and how to identify and monetize one's side hustle.
Cost: Prices range from \$25 for a Friday only ticket, to \$125 for vendors
More Info: Visit youcantfailinc.org

What: Syracuse Lead Prevention Coalition monthly meeting
When: 6 to 7:30 p.m. Monday, Feb. 11
Where: Iron Workers Local 60, 500 W. Genesee St.
Details: The group will work to develop an action plan and discuss the path forward with coalition building. Legal Services CNY will also attend and share updates on community outreach.
Cost: Free and open to the public
More Info: Visit Facebook and search for 'Syracuse Lead Prevention Coalition'

Syracuse has many issues to address in 2019. Improving safety and education in the city, determining a plan for the I-81 viaduct and pushing for greater economic development for the South Side are just a few South Side residents may list.

Here at The Stand we strive to inform on such issues with a focus on the impact these matters will have on this neighborhood. We also aim to tell the stories often overlooked by highlighting portraits of success, stability and redemption.

In this issue, meet two couples defying the stereotype that black love — *especially married love* — doesn't last. Starting on Page 10, read how the Billues have shared unconditional love since the first day they met, and how Deputy Mayor Sharon Owens and her husband, Shaun, grew their friendship into a 28-year marriage.



Last year at this time, The Stand highlighted a journalism exchange to South Africa by a group of Newhouse professors and students, local high school media students and our music columnist and board member, Reggie Seigler.

The trip sparked a new partnership with a local paper there as well. Following The Stand's model, staff at Grocott's Mail hosted a Photo Walk through its community the week after The Stand's annual July walk. Images from both walks are shared on Page 16, along with details on a South Africa to Syracuse Symposium organized by Ken Harper, one of the professors who made the overseas journey last year.

This event will confront issues of equality, privilege and justice from both continents' perspectives and is open to all in the community. Rather than being a typical panel discussion, these interactive sessions will allow guests to participate in open dialogue with each other and the organizers.

Our new intern, Nabiha Asim, a graduate student at Syracuse University's S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, began this semester and looks forward to reporting on the community. She plans to focus on the future of the I-81 viaduct as her beat, keeping readers up-to-date on the latest news and diving deep to contribute an in-depth feature by May.

I hope you enjoy all the pieces in this issue. Check online for more stories and upcoming community events.

Ashley Kang

SERIES RETURNS

100 Black Men of Syracuse, a mentoring organization for youth, launched its 2019 4th Mondays Series last month.

These new, monthly two-for-one personal finance and wellness sessions will continue through June with one-hour public forums held on the fourth Monday of each month starting at 5:30 p.m. at the South Side Innovation Center, 2610 S. Salina St.

February's session will focus on retirement planning and heart disease.

"It's All About the Benjamins" will be offered Feb. 25 and feature financial advisor Devin White of Janney Montgomery Scott.

For more information about the 4th Mondays series, email 100 Black Men at 100bkmsyr@gmail.com.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENT

The Onondaga County Office for Aging seeks three nominations to honor outstanding community members for **Senior Citizen of the Year**, **Serving Seniors Honoree of the Year** and the **Flanders Memorial Caregiver of the Year**.

Honorees will be awarded May 16 during a Celebration Luncheon for Onondaga County Seniors at Drumlins Country Club.

In 2018, the Senior Citizen of the Year was **Dorothy L. White**, who served as the chairperson of the community outreach ministry at St. Alban's Episcopal Church, which made and distributed 1,500 pillowcases to nursing homes in Onondaga County. White is also a member of the Towpath Quilt Guild and

Sankofa Piecemakers Quilting group.

Additional honorees included two for Serving Seniors: **Brian Evans Sr.** and **Merriette Chance Pollard**. Evans is a senior companion through InterFaith Works, and Pollard worked with Dunbar Center's senior programming. Last year's Flanders Memorial Caregiver of the Year was **Mary Anne Barth**, for serving as a caregiver to her parents for almost eight years.

Nomination forms are due by **Feb. 15** either digitally or mailed to the Onondaga County Office for Aging at 421 Montgomery St., 10th Floor, Syracuse, NY 13202, Attn: Cherry Lamb.

To download nomination forms, visit ongov.net/aging/news.

Emmanuel Flowers

Nominated by Robert Birchmeyer

By Matthew Gutierrez
Staff Reporter

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

A: I don't know if most fathers feel it. It was a rebirth. A new feeling for me. With my first born, I was still young. I had to straighten up. Every smile, every tear was like, 'Thank you for being here,' moving me in the right direction and being worthy. My second child was a gift to my first one. I wanted him to have someone to play with because he deserves someone to play with. For me as a father, he was another chance for me to affect the world.

Q: What was your relationship like with your father?

A: My mother left my father to have a better life. She came here to Syracuse to be with her father as he was getting older. I talked to him on the phone a few times and understood that I had a father. Not until I was back in Syracuse, out of the military, that I got to know him. We went to visit a few times when I was younger. They were always good experiences. But I didn't get a chance to learn fathering from him.

Q: Why are fathers important?

A: I know the stories I heard about my dad's wrongdoings, which guided me to do better. You have this remarkable ability to make mistakes and grow. Patience is one of the best skills a father can have. One thing that helps children is when their father loves their mother. You don't have to be with her to show her love. It's when you don't get along and you show her love that builds better children. When people don't agree, there's still love. When people are mad or unhappy, love is still beautiful. Love endures.

Q: How can fathers break through the "tough guy" culture?

A: A father can show his child weakness. I know a lot of fathers never show their children, especially their sons, that they're hurt. They look at love as being soft and nurturing, and so they look at it as being a woman's thing. No. Showing vulnerabilities can be helpful. No need to hold it in. Showing them emotion helps them grow.

Q: What advice do you give your kids?

A: Don't do anything where you look in the mirror and were ashamed of the person you see. Don't be offended by what looks back at you. Have faith in yourself that the decisions you make



MEET FATHER EMMANUEL: Flowers, 43, a youth neighborhood and family advocate for Brady Faith Center. | Provided Photo

may not always work out now, but that they are on the road to working out. It's OK to fall. It's not OK to not get up. Pick yourself up and keep moving.

Q: With 10 children, how do you find balance?

A: I learned from being in the military that if you don't take care of your family, you won't have a family to take care of. I was in the military from 1995-2000, active, and from 2000-03, reserve and inactive. I realized if I didn't sacrifice income for family, I'd have a lot of money for medical bills, counseling and I'd be lonely. So I've left a few jobs because I needed to take care of my home life. I worked at some restaurants, and they wanted me to work on Thanksgiving. I told them in January, I need this Thanksgiving off for my family. Even if it meant they fired me. It was the right thing to do.

Q: Final thoughts?

A: Erase the roles. At the Brady Faith Center, we teach young boys how to clean, cook, nurture and how to communicate. It's important as a father to show children all of those things. Girls need to see that a man should be able to wash, cook, mop floors and not think that's not for them. They need to know how to take care of themselves.

ACCURATE COUNT

City, County Prepare for 2020 Census, announce job openings

By Ashley Kang
The Stand Director

U.S. Census representatives work to promote effort so every citizen will be counted

Mayor Ben Walsh and Onondaga County Executive Ryan McMahon have joined forces to encourage neighborhood agencies to become partners in the 2020 census outreach campaign. They want to ensure no one is missed in the upcoming count.

U.S. census representatives visited Syracuse Dec. 12 to talk about why an accurate count of all New York residents is so crucially important. Elizabeth Burakowski, deputy director of Upstate Revitalization for New York State Homes and Community Renewal, explained data from the final 2020 count is used to calculate legislative representation and allot \$675 billion in federal funds to nonprofit programs.

The more people counted in any region, the more money and representation in congress it will receive. An accurate count is critical to protect New York's share of that funding — estimated at \$53 billion each year, according to the state's Department of State.

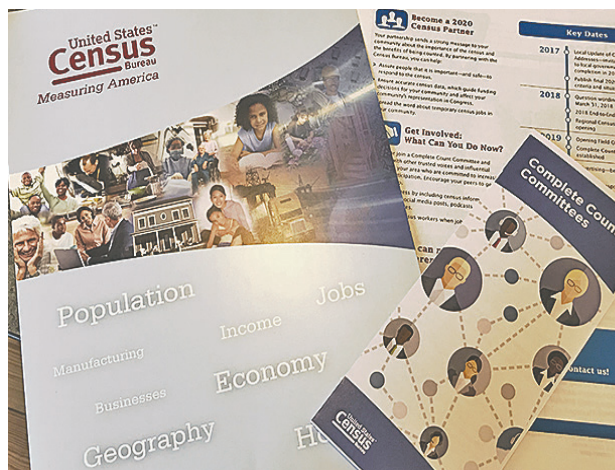
Deputy Mayor Sharon Owens spoke after the representatives to stress the census count's importance. "Our Community Development Block Grant dollars are based on a formula from the census data, so it's scary to not get an accurate count," she said.

The visiting representatives discussed strategies for reaching hard-to-count populations like refugees and non-English speakers, people living in poverty, children under the age of 5 and African-American males between the ages of 18-24.

Ian Hull, an assistant division chief for the census, said a test of the census count was conducted last year in Providence County, R.I. He said the results found the most difficult group to get an accurate count of proved to be young, adult black males. Working in partnership with the Urban League, a suggestion was made to place kiosks in barbershops where individuals could complete census forms.

Such creative ideas and partnerships are exactly what the U.S. Census Bureau hopes local agencies can help develop here in Syracuse. Efforts are already underway to develop a Complete Count Committee of volunteers to increase awareness about the census and motivate residents to respond.

Later in 2019, a field office will open in Syracuse with advertising and outreach efforts launching in early



2020. From March through July 2020, census takers will go door to door to non-responders. The final count is due to the president by Dec. 31, 2020.

Results will be released to the public by April 2021.

Hull said 500,000 new jobs will be offered nationwide in the next two years in preparation of the census count completed that April 1. The majority of the job openings are field positions with a limited number of office support and management positions. Hiring is underway and will continue through spring of 2020.

The 2020 census will also be the first time residents can respond online. Hull noted there are three ways to file: online, by completing the mail-in form and by phone. Information provided is used to compile statistical data at the local, state and national levels. Officials said personal information on individuals will never be released. The goal of the census is to count everyone once.

"Wherever you are living on April 1, 2020 that is where you are to be counted," Hull said.

Visiting representatives said that some — such as undocumented workers living in the U.S. — are cautious about sharing personal information and may want to abstain from completing the form. They hope people fill out the form anyway.

Last March, the U.S. Commerce Department requested that citizenship status be added to the 2020 census. After the question was announced, 17 states, including California and New York, filed suit seeking its removal. On Jan. 15, a judge for the U.S. Southern District of New York enjoined the Secretary of Commerce from adding the question.

The U.S. Supreme Court said it would not hear an appeal, although an emergency request could still be filed.

GETTING THE COUNT

To help ensure all residents are counted, the Census workers have partnered with tribal, state and local governments, as well as, volunteers from community-based organizations, faith-based groups, schools, the media and others to create Complete Count Committees (CCC). The goal of each CCC is to educate and motivate residents to participate in the 2020 census.

The **Complete Count Committee** program will:

- Utilize local knowledge, influence and resources to educate communities and promote the census through targeted outreach
- Mobilize cooperative efforts to reach hard to count groups
- Help the U.S. Census Bureau get a complete count in 2020 through united partnerships and recruit census workers as jobs become available

To learn more, visit [census.gov](https://www.census.gov)

SPEAKERS SERIES

#28SpeakersIn28Days

A CommUNITY Engagement Speaking Tour will be held throughout Black History Month. This collaborative initiative features all local speakers who will engage the community in schools, churches and organizations throughout the city.

The series' goal is to provide the opportunity to learn about previous contributions of those that have paved the way for leaders of today.

Each speaker will be responsible for choosing and presenting a black historical figure that has inspired them.

The series kicks off Friday, Feb. 1, at Syracuse Academy of Science and Citizenship Charter School with an all-student assembly. Future speakers will present at events throughout the city.

Speakers will then continue every day for the entire month.

This series has been organized by Masking & Kompany along with Dr. Shanelle Benson-Reid from ACCESS Global Enterprises and the support of additional volunteers.

To learn more, contact Joshua Michael King at maskingandko2013@gmail.com

COMMUNITY EVENTS

Black history to be honored through historical enactments, music and more



> Children read books on historical black figures during a past year's Interactive History Museum. | File Photo

WHAT: RELATIVELY SEEKING: SOLVING FAMILY HISTORY MYSTERIES

WHEN: 6 to 7 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 7

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

DETAILS: Brenda Muhammad will host this session to share genealogy tips and tricks for solving African-American family genealogy mysteries. She will also share her personal genealogy journey.

COST: Free and open to all ages

MORE INFO.: Call (315) 435-3395

WHAT: PRECIOUS CARGO: AN ARTISTIC EXPLORATION OF BLACK MIGRATIONS HISTORY

WHEN: 1 to 3 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 9

WHERE: Beauchamp Branch Library Literacy Room, 2111 S. Salina St.

DETAILS: Artist Art Brangman will utilize his artwork to provide a historical exploration of African-American heritage, urging attendees to begin the process of closure so healing can begin. Participants will also have an opportunity to design their own Adinkra symbols. Brangman's artwork will remain on display at the library throughout the month.

COST: Free and open to all ages

WHAT: BLACK MIGRATIONS: A JOURNEY THROUGH MUSIC ARTS

WHEN: 2 to 4 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 9

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

DETAILS: Joan Hillsman Music Network will host a talent show featuring poetry, dance and a musical performance by the Syracuse Chapter Gospel Music Workshop of America.

COST: Free and open to all ages

WHAT: CONTRIBUTING FACTORS: HOW ANNIE EASLEY REACHED NASA

WHEN: 3:30 to 4:30 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 9

WHERE: Museum of Science & Technology (MOST), 500 S. Franklin St.

DETAILS: View the new "SUN AS ART: Photos from the NASA Solar Dynamics Observatory" exhibit and see a special performance in the Bristol Omnitheater of "Contributing Factors: How Annie Easley Reached NASA" from Syracuse Stage's Backstory program. The Backstory program is a live, interactive and creative history lesson for upper elementary students to adults. Actors will bring historical characters to life.

COST: Special exhibit and screening is included with

paid admission; \$12 for adults and \$10 for child
MORE INFO.: Visit most.org or call (315) 425-9068

WHAT: BLACK WOMEN'S WELLNESS: MIND, BODY, SOUL

WHEN: 6 to 9 p.m. Friday, Feb. 15

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

DETAILS: Evening will focus on the importance of overall wellness for women of color and will feature local vendors and a yoga class with Marcelle Haddix (ZenG).

TICKETS: Free and open to the public

MORE INFO.: Call (315) 442-2230

WHAT: ENACTMENT OF FREDERICK DOUGLASS AND HUGH MASEKELA

WHEN: 3 to 4:30 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 16

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

DETAILS: The character, speech, action and gestures of Frederick Douglass and Hugh Masekela will be dramatically presented by Pan African Community of Central New York youth and Syracuse University students.

COST: Free and open to the public

WHAT: A TIME FOR JOY AND A TIME FOR SORROW EXHIBITION

WHEN: Opening reception from 5 to 7 p.m. Thursday, Feb 21; exhibit runs Feb. 19 through March 23

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

DETAILS: This exhibit is an exploration of identity, spirituality and the significance of experience. Spencer Stultz utilizes portraiture to interrogate the complexities of life, utilizing her personal lens to engage and conceptualize topics that are intangible, yet integral to the human experience.

COST: Free and open to the public

WHAT: VIBE WITH DASHÉ AND FRIENDS

WHEN: 5 to 8 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 23; doors 5 p.m./show 6 p.m.

WHERE: The Likeminded Workspace, 2223 S. Salina St.

DETAILS: Hear Dashé and other local artists, enjoy food, vendors and additional entertainment. Attendees encouraged to wear African-style garments.

COST: \$7 in advance, \$10 at the door

TICKETS.: Call (315) 876-4135

WHAT: FROM PANTHER 21 TO 21ST CENTURY REVOLUTIONS

WHEN: 6 to 9 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 23

WHERE: ArtRage Gallery, 505 Hawley Ave.

DETAILS: Sekou Odinga, dequi kioni-sadiki and Matt Meyer will explore the trajectory of the Black Panther Party to present-day.

COST: Free and open to the public

MORE INFO.: Call (315) 218-5711

WHAT: CNY JAZZ BLACK HISTORY MONTH CABARET

WHEN: 4 to 8 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 24

WHERE: Marriot Syracuse Downtown Finger Lakes Ballroom, 100 E. Onondaga St.

DETAILS: Saxophonist Marcus Anderson will perform.

COST: \$35 in advance, \$40 at the door; \$10 for students

TICKETS: Purchase in advance at cnyjazz.org or call (315) 479-5299

WHAT: PRINCE'S MARCUS ANDERSON: ARTIST AND ENTREPRENEUR

WHEN: Noon to 1 p.m. Monday, Feb. 25

WHERE: Peter Graham Scholarly Commons, Room 114, Bird Library on the Syracuse University campus, 222 Waverly Ave.

DETAILS: Billboard chart-topping saxophonist Marcus Anderson will describe his years of honing his craft as a member of Prince's New Power Generation Band, tours with Cee-lo and others and discuss his new entrepreneurial product named 'ANDcoffee.' In the context of Black History Month, he will reflect on the current state of the music industry and how music can promote social/cultural understanding. Conversation will be moderated by new Community Folk Art Center Executive Director Tanisha Jackson and include a solo performance by Anderson.

COST: Free and open to the public

MORE INFO.: Call (315) 442-2230

WHAT: UNDERGROUND RAILROAD LAP QUILT RAFFLE

WHEN: Drawing 11 a.m. Thursday, Feb 28; tickets available starting Feb. 1

WHERE: Onondaga Free Library, 4840 W. Seneca Turnpike

DETAILS: Quilts may have played a significant role in communication between slaves and helped them on their way to freedom. In honor of Black History Month, the Friends will raffle a lap quilt whose design is inspired by the Underground Railroad.

TICKETS: Single tickets \$5 or five tickets for \$20

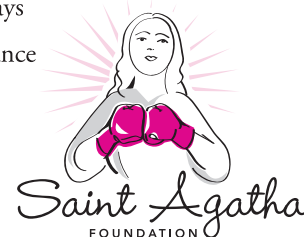
MORE INFO.: Call (315) 492-1727

Do you need help with your breast cancer bills?

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

The following costs can be covered:

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



We can help you.

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

Unfortunate Circumstances



> Marrell Edwards' background could have made him an inspirational hire as a case manager for PEACE Inc.'s family-reunification program. But now he faces federal drug charges and up to 40 years in prison. | Ashley Kang, Staff Photographer

By Ashley Kang & Greg Munno
The Stand Director and Newhouse School Advisor

PEACE Inc.'s recently hired case manager faces federal drug charges, returns to jail after two months on the job

Marrell Edwards' troubled past made him the ideal candidate to help Syracuse residents re-enter society after release from prison.

At least that was the thinking of PEACE Inc., who hired Edwards in November to serve as a case manager for its family-reunification program, a grant-funded effort to reduce recidivism by providing support to parolees.

But Edwards' past is now being used against him as he faces federal charges of conspiring to sell cocaine, according to court records. Federal prosecutors filed a sealed indictment against Edwards and 12 others on Dec. 19, and Edwards was formally charged in federal court in Syracuse on Jan. 9.

On Jan. 15, U.S. Magistrate Judge Andrew Baxter ordered Edwards held without bail, justifying the decision in part on Edwards' past convictions, as well as the strength of the evidence against him, according to Baxter's detention order.

The indictment also mentions Edwards' past, stating that he is subject to harsher penalties because of past convictions. It cites three convictions between 1995 and 2007, all for criminal possession of a controlled substance.

The impact of Edwards' arrest on PEACE's family-reunification program isn't entirely clear as representatives from PEACE either did not return phone calls or declined to speak on the record. Sources have told The Stand, though, that Edwards is on unpaid leave from his position and that PEACE has chosen a replacement.

Edwards is being represented by Samuel Breslin, a court-appointed attorney based out of Albany, according to court records. Breslin did not return calls seeking comment.

A spokeswoman for the FBI field office in Albany, which covers Syracuse, declined to comment, saying she could not offer details on a pending case. A spokesman for the U.S. attorney's office in Syracuse said Baxter's detention order means Edwards was placed in the custody of the U.S. Marshals Service, which has contracts with local jails to house inmates like Edwards. He declined to say where Edwards was being held or provide other details on the case.

That leaves the indictment as the only source of information on what Edwards is actually accused of, and the indictment itself provides few details.

The indictment states Edwards and the 12 other defendants "conspired with each other and others to knowingly and intentionally possess with the intent to distribute one or more controlled substances" in violation of two U.S. laws. The substances, the indictment continues, "involved 500 grams or more of a mixture and substance containing a detectable amount of cocaine."

The activity took place between April and October 2018, according to the indictment.

If convicted of the charges — possession with intent to distribute a controlled substance and conspiracy to distribute a controlled substance — he would face a minimum of five and a maximum of 40 years in prison.

Another defendant is former Syracuse University football player Marcus Sales, and three other defendants appear to face more serious and detailed charges due to prior felony drug convictions. For example, the indictment details specific dates Brian McAlpine “knowingly and intentionally distributed” cocaine. No such details exist for Edwards’ charges.

PAST AS PROLOGUE

In multiple interviews with The Stand prior to his January arrest, Edwards was candid about his past struggles with drugs and the law. Coming of age in the ’80s, Edwards said he progressed from partying and smoking pot to crack. The drug was then widely used. He’d seen older guys using it and was curious, he said.

“‘What are you guys smoking?’” he told The Stand he asked these users. “‘Why’s it smell like that?’”

The users chased him off. “‘You don’t want any part of this,’” he remembered them telling him.

“They told me that all the time,” he said. “So, I introduced myself.”

For \$10, he got his first taste, and for the next 18 years, he was an addict, he said. “From ages 18 to 36, I went in and out of jails and (rehabilitation centers),” he said. “It tore up my relationships.”

In 2017, PEACE turned to Karen Loftin, who had recovered from her own drug and legal troubles, to initially head a state-funded, \$95,000 pilot program to help parolees re-enter society. By all accounts, Loftin was having success in the position, but her role was suspended when the initial grant funding ran out in February 2018.

The grant lapsed for nearly seven months until a state renewal at the end of the summer. PEACE then sought to fill Loftin’s former role, interviewing more than 20 candidates.

Edwards stood out because of his desire to work in this field and success in overcoming his own obstacles, people familiar with the hire said.

Edwards’ efforts started slow while he reconnected with grant partners and participants.

“Because of the lapse in the grant, I started by revisiting cases that were still active and worked to connect with DOCCS to see who is soon returning from prison and might qualify for Syracuse Housing, which is specific to the grant,” he said. DOCCS is the state Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, a partner.

REDEMPTION AND DOUBT

Edwards attributed his recovery from addiction to the prayers of both his grandmothers.

“I can’t explain it,” he said. “One day I had a taste (for drugs), and the next I didn’t.”

His grandmothers Vera (maternal) and Emma (paternal) both repeatedly told him how smart he was and advised him to stay out of trouble.

“I never went out looking for trouble,” Edwards said with a laugh during the in-person interview held late last year. “I wasn’t a bad guy; I was just hooked on drugs.”

When he stopped using drugs, the crimes stopped, he told The Stand. The challenge came in finding work and staying motivated.

Edwards said people can overcome addictions by finding something to fuel their self-esteem and replace those tendencies.

“A lot of small victories help a person dealing with substance abuse issues,” he said. “They’re told to stop doing drugs, but when their day before was filled with 16 hours of drug use, you have to propose something to fill that void.”

Education filled Edwards’ “drug void,” he said.

“When I came home in 2007, I wasn’t welcomed beyond my family,” he said. Because of a gap in his employment history and having to report a felony on job applications, he found initial work as a janitor. “I felt I was overlooked for jobs I was qualified for,” he said.

He started classes at Onondaga Community College, next moving on to complete a bachelor’s degree in social work from Syracuse University, graduating in 2015.

OCC professors Ednita Wright and Tina May kept him motivated in those early years.

“Those ladies did a lot for my self-esteem and my spirit,” he recalled. “They had such a vision for me, and they gave me confidence.”

May, in an interview before his recent arrest, recalled advising him to gain further education, telling him how “our community needs his energy and his experience.” She said his work at PEACE furthers the influence he was clearly born and blessed to bestow upon others.

She said Edwards’ example of compassion stood out.

“Marrell’s life of experience on multiple sides of challenging issues, equipped with his intelligence and super sharp thought process made him a wonderful person to succeed at impacting the lives of others positively,” she said, describing him as an inspiration to his fellow classmates.

Edwards told The Stand just that — that he wanted to be a positive role model.

Edwards will serve as an example, one way or the other. If he beats the charge and resumes his work helping others, he could still fulfill his vision. If he returns to prison after more than a decade living on the outside with a job and an education, his tale may instead serve as a painful reminder of just how hard it can be to escape the cycle of incarceration.

GRANT DETAILS

The purpose of the Family Reunification Grant is to carefully screen and monitor formerly incarcerated individuals so they can live in public housing with their families.

The grant is a partnership of three Syracuse agencies and unique because it allows those previously convicted of a felony and enrolled in the program to be added to a public housing unit’s lease.

Grant partners include:

1. **Syracuse Housing Authority** — screening and allowing those released from prison a chance to move into units with family
2. **PEACE Inc.** — providing case management to help participants move toward self-sufficiency
3. **Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS)** — monitoring participants as part of their parole

The grant is funded by the New York Department of State in an effort to help fight homelessness, enhance public safety and reduce the risk of recidivism.

Unconditional Love



> Aundra, 56, and Twiggy Billue, 54, have been married for 31 years. A longstanding tradition they share is to enjoy Ethiopian food each year on their anniversary, June 6. Twiggy works as the workforce development coordinator for Jubilee Homes of Syracuse Inc., and Aundra is retired. | Ben Cleeton, Staff Photographer

By Ashley Kang
The Stand Director

Two Syracuse couples talk about how their long-lasting love defies stereotypes

There has been limited research focused on African-American marriages.

What research has been done has generally found that, compared to other groups, blacks have among the lowest marriage rates. African-Americans tend to marry at a later age and spend less time married than whites, according to Patricia Dixon, author of “African American Relationships, Marriages, and Families.”

A recent study by the Family Process Institute looked at the strengths of 39 African-American couples. Vital to these couples’ success was their ability to practice open and honest communication, the ability to understand a marriage is made up of two individuals and a willingness to allow marital expectations to evolve.

Two South Side couples spoke with *The Stand* to share how they have kept their marriages going for decades.

THE BILLUES

Their relationship shattered all norms, says Aundra Billue, who tells his three children their mother saved

his life.

After Memorial Day in 1987, he was on his way to his grandmother's house when he heard someone call his name.

Twiggy, then Simmons, was with her friend at 118 Dablon Court in Pioneer Homes. Aundra caught her eye. Her friend already knew Aundra, so Twiggy clamored for an introduction.

For her it was love at first sight. For him, it was much more.

Aundra was living with his sister who was about to be evicted. He'd also recently learned the military would not accept him because he only had a GED. He was walking to his grandmother's house that day to ask if he could crash there until he scraped together enough money for his own place. Consumed with uncertainty for his future, he wasn't looking for a relationship.

Yet a few hours after meeting Twiggy, he no longer needed a place to stay because she invited him to move in with her.

"That's what I felt," she said, telling him "even if we don't make it, you can still stay here."

Aundra is still grateful.

"If I never met her," Aundra said, "I don't even know what I'd be doing."

He saw her, and still sees her, as a person with a good heart, who is dedicated and genuine. He felt nothing but unconditional love from her.

"When you recognize those qualities, you have to take a chance," he said. "How much longer should I have waited for her to try and prove something more than she showed me from day one?"

Since that first day, the pair has been inseparable. So their next leap may not come as such a surprise.

Eight days after meeting, they tied the knot.

"He dared me," Twiggy said of his proposal.

She wanted to take him back to her home of D.C. to meet her mother and family. He wasn't sure what they would think of him. She told him they liked anyone she likes ... that he was her friend.

And with that, he said he wouldn't go unless they were married.

"You barely know me," she responded, stunned. But the shock soon wore off as she took him up on his dare, which he continued to push.

"The courthouse is right down the street," he said. "We can go and complete all the paperwork."

"Then let's go," she snapped back.

After filling out all the forms, they were told they had to wait 24 hours to be married. The state wants you to have that thinking period, Twiggy says, adding that night

friends came to take Aundra out, to discourage him.

But the next morning, a Saturday, Aundra walked up the steps of the house of a reverend he knew since he was a boy and asked if he would marry them.

"The reverend's wife pulled together a piano and flowers, and we had the ceremony right in their living room on the corner of Midland and Borden avenues," Twiggy said.

"I'm still in love with this man..."

— Twiggy Billue

"I'm in love with this man. I've been in love with him since the day I saw him," she said. "I have friends who tell me they are jealous that I'm still in love. But today is no different than the day I met him, except I now have a home with him. And the love is probably 50 percent more."



> The couple spent many past anniversaries celebrating in a big way with weekend-long parties in their home, where they are pictured. | Ben Cleeton, Staff Photographer

SEEK MORE?

Pick up the March issue to read our follow-up feature on local newly wed couples' love stories.

Learn how these pairs met, fell in love and overcame the honeymoon phase.

MAKE A VALENTINE

Personalize Valentine's Day by visiting Beauchamp Branch Library from 5 to 6 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 14, to craft a card for your sweetheart.

Materials will be provided and walks-ins are welcome. Card-making takes place on the library's first floor at 2111 S. Salina St. and is intended for teens and adults.

RING IN ROMANCE

What: Romance at the Mansion

When: 6:30 to 11 p.m.
Friday, Feb. 8

Where: Barnes Hiscock Mansion, 930 James St.

Details: Hosted by the Promise Land Church's Marriage Works Ministry, this event invites married couples to enjoy a candlelit dinner, live music and marriage guidance. Pastor Lee and Tonya Wilson will share practical tools and biblical marriage guidance, and Brownskin Band will perform.

Cost: \$120 per couple

To reserve: Contact the Promise Land Church at (315) 627-0414



> Shaun, 54, and Sharon Owens, 55, have been married for 28 years. They say the key to their longevity is their Christian faith. Shaun has lived in the city his entire life, while Sharon moved to the city in 1981 to start college at Syracuse University. Their anniversary is July 7. | Ben Cleeton, Staff Photographer

THE OWENS

Syracuse Deputy Mayor Sharon Owens and her husband Shaun, a driver working the evening shift for UPS, have been married for 28 steady years.

The couple met through mutual friends and established a friendship of their own before marrying a year later.

Shaun believes he asked her out first, but both are a bit fuzzy on the details.

"You're asking about a long time ago," Sharon said with a laugh, adding that she can't remember how he proposed. Looking to each other, they contemplate when they knew they were in love. Neither can pinpoint an exact time nor recall a "fireworks moment."

"The thing about us, we never had one of those fiery relationships," Sharon said. "I remember friends who had those. I don't see any of them still together."

Their relationship has been steadfast.

"It's always been a steady as you go relationship," Sharon said. "To say it like that sounds boring, but that's what it is."

Shaun agreed. "It grew from a friendship and we just clicked," he said.

At their wedding, they danced to "Have You Ever Loved Somebody" by Freddie Jackson and honeymooned

in the Poconos.

Their greatest challenge happened when their second child, Shaun's namesake, was born prematurely and died a week later. With only a few years of marriage under their belt and toddler Simone, now 28, to care for at home, the death could have torn their marriage apart. Instead, Sharon says, it made them stronger as they both turned to God and each other to heal.

Then eight years later Isaac, now 19, was born with autism. Many people don't understand the nuances of being a family with a child with special

needs, Sharon believes. "That difference and who we are as a unit makes us a strong family," she said.

Their partnership has been built from a solid foundation and grown stronger with each passing year.

When people ask Shaun how they've been together so long, he tells them marriage is the good life, explaining each provides the counter balance the other needs.

"It's like we're not the same, but we are the same," he said. "In many ways, she's the total opposite of me."

The couple formed a quick bond and have continued to grow together.

"For us it came together pretty quickly," Sharon said. "But it took 27 years to get to where we are. Every day you learn something new."

"It's always been a steady as you go relationship."

— Sharon Owens



"NO INNOCENCE THIS SIDE OF THE WOMB"

Confronting Issues of Equality,
Privilege, and Justice,
from Syracuse and South Africa

*"Power is something of which I am convinced there
is no innocence this side of the womb"*

— Nadine Gordimer

02/28

Thursday, 5pm

Joyce Hergenhan Auditorium
Newhouse 3

This interactive event will bring together Syracuse and South African artists, academics, activists, journalists and the audience to analyze how we have responded to our shared struggles.

LEARN MORE

newhouseglobal.syr.edu/event/satosyr

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ACCESSIBILITY INFORMATION

Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) will be available during all panel discussions and Q&As. Contact Kristen Northrop at (315) 443-7358 with questions.

ABOUT
AUTHOR

Lennie Tucker is a retired Syracuse teacher and an organizer of the nonprofit group Felder Indoor Track and Field Stadium.

Her hope is by making this track accessible to Syracuse residents it can awaken hopes and dreams in local youth.

“Like the boy with the gold medals, the children will delight us,” she writes. “At their best, they shall change the world. Share with me this vision and the work needed to make it a reality, won’t you?”

To contact Tucker, email lennieruns@aol.com

GETTING LACED UP

Longtime runner believes the sport can offer ‘magic’ to local youth

By Lennie Tucker
Guest Column

Can the Felder Indoor Track and Field Stadium be brought to Syracuse?

When I was about 7 (I’m 80 now), I already knew I loved to run. I raced my mom from the hen house to the windmill. She won without breaking a single egg in the half-filled bucket she carried. Three or four years later, I raced on a track in Nemaha County, Kansas. I was smart enough to know I better not wear my Sunday or school shoes, so I ran barefoot. My long-legged friend beat me that day.

For every runner, the sport has personal meaning. For me, it is nature and friends. The low growl of the snow-covered earth under my feet at the end of February. The Mountain Goat run, when there were five peaks. A 50-miler and feeling the wind from the banks of Lake Erie. But more so, friends. Running friends have a particular bond, even if they were strangers moments before.

How does one talk about the impact of running? You don’t have to be fast or athletic. You don’t have to have expensive equipment. You don’t even need youth. You just have to start. That is why I want to bring the Madison Square Garden track to Syracuse in time for the 2019-2020 indoor track season.

The banked board, portable track has a storied history in the Millrose Games. In 2005, Bernard Lagat set a track record for the famous Wanamaker Mile (3:52.87), running in the footsteps of greats like “Chairman of the Boards” Eamonn Coghlan and Olympians Jackie Joyner-Kersey and Mary Decker Slaney. When the games were moved a few years ago, the track was put in storage. It recently became available.

I want more of our young people to discover how far running can take them — young people like a student at one of Syracuse’s poorest schools.

After the first round of the District Qualifying Youth Track Meet in 2017, this boy carrying his gold medals found me on the infield wondering who to give them back to saying, “I can’t go to the next round.” We made sure he kept them. In 2018, his two fast feet carried him successfully through the qualifiers at Nottingham High School, the regionals in Ohio, a side trip to the Liberty Games in Schenectady and then to the Drake University campus in Des Moines, Iowa, for the finals of the AAU National Junior Olympics.

This boy runs a fine 400-meter race faster than



> Patrice Williams, a former Corcoran track star known as “The Silent Bullet” who now runs for Northeastern University, prepares in 2013 to compete at the State Championship in the 300-meter dash. | File Photo

any but the very fastest. He did it by himself. That’s the magic of running. I watched his race, full of pride. Five colleges would be in touch soon, as well as two individuals who were ready to pay for his college tuition.

I was a teacher in Syracuse where children, my students, were forced to grow up too soon. Their reality, as I have had to say far too often is, “shoot or be shot.” These kids were like my own. I studied them, cared for them and hoped to inspire and save them.

Like Jamar. He was a tall 5-year-old who galloped everywhere. He died at age 22, shot in the belly. There is “M,” who left school at age 16 and within the week killed a man in front of a bar for the \$5 the man had in his pocket. That sweet-faced, dimpled child is in state prison for life. The fates of Jamar and M did not have to be any more than it should be for any of our city kids.

So what is my plan? I wish to bring together my love for running, children and the promise they have to change lives. I wish to bring the Madison Square Garden track to Syracuse as a gift for these children, our children and their families. Surely, the Madison Square Garden track is not a guarantee of a better life. But it is an opportunity for them to have something that is for them. It is portable and purchased. If returned to international specs as it once was in the Garden, not only can it serve our families but it can return revenue as well. A community track could surround the Garden track. Grandpas pushing strollers around the community loop, moms and dads getting some exercise in a place they can walk to from their homes. A safe place, no matter the weather or the world outside.

There are many hurdles: finding a building large enough to put the track inside; dozens of people to set it up and take it down; volunteers for track events, and evangelists to spread the word.



NEW UNITS

Freedom Commons nears completion

By Ashley Kang
The Stand Director

Project to focus on helping qualifying individuals and families find stability, then move on to permanent housing

Freedom Commons, a unique 57-unit residence being built as a collaboration between Center for Community Alternatives (CCA) and Syracuse Housing Authority (SHA), is set to be completed on Burt Street by March 1.

Construction has been in the works since the summer, but many South Side residents have limited knowledge about just who the intended tenants will be.

Marissa Saunders, the newly hired director of community engagement for CCA, and Kelly Gonzalez, the newly appointed deputy director, met with South Side residents Jan. 6 during the monthly Southside Tomorrow's Neighborhoods Today meeting to update residents on the project.

"We are working now to go around and make sure community stakeholders understand exactly what is coming," Saunders said.

Some are concerned a new halfway house and/or shelter is being built, but Gonzalez clarified that the majority of units are affordable apartments for families. A collection of other units will be open to individuals with a criminal history, but it's not likely this will include individuals just getting out of prison. "Because there is an income requirement to apply, it will unlikely be someone day one out of prison," she said.

CCA thinks of the partnership in three parts. First the new construction will provide affordable housing to families in the form of one-, two- and three-bedroom units. These will be leased and managed by SHA and rented out based on a lottery system.

Next, nine units will be what Gonzalez describes as "supportive housing." These are intended for homeless individuals, which she says could include those with criminal backgrounds or a qualifying disability or mental disorder. "CCA will provide the social services and wrap-around services for these residents," she said.

The final feature is emergency housing, which will be known as the Freedom Commons Academy. These 11 beds will also be overseen and managed by CCA. Gonzalez said this is not being called a shelter because the purpose and offering is much more. The academy space will be a setting to help individuals get back on their feet, learn skills and gain stability. It will help them take the next steps to permanent housing, Gonzalez explained.

Individuals living and enrolled in the academy will be required to engage with services that CCA offers and will have an opportunity for greater support from peer-to-peer mentoring from other residents.

The pair added that the project wants to be inclusive and will have a community space open to the public and include a community advisory board.



> Top: Freedom Commons construction progress into the winter. | Ben Cleeton Staff Photographer Bottom Two: Workers installing drywall in July, and the Rev. James Pinkston, at left, and JoAnn Walker share a conversation outside the construction site on Burt Street. | Todd Michalek, Staff Photographer

CULTURES COLLIDE

Inkululeko, a nonprofit organization with Syracuse roots that works in South Africa, will discuss its mission at the Syracuse University's Nancy Cantor Warehouse from 6 to 8 p.m. March 1.

The event is a mix and mingle with leadership from the organization, including board members and visiting South African Zuko Gqadavama, who will be speaking at Syracuse University's Symposium.

Inkululeko offers free tutoring, access to computers, transportation, exam prep and a library to young South African students.

Outreach events like the one held on March 1 at 350 W. Fayette St. help expand Inkululeko's capacity to serve more young people each year. Cost for the event is \$5 for students and \$15 for general admission. For more information, visit inkululeko.org.

VIEW IMAGES

View a collection of Photo Walk images this month during the **"No Innocence This Side of the Womb" Symposium**. To learn more, visit newhouseglobal.syr.edu/vent/satosyr/

SHARED STORIES

Annual Photo Walk expands to connect Syracuse to South Africa



> Residents of Grahamstown, South Africa, participated in a Photo Walk to document the daily lives of people in their towns. The program was modeled off of The Stand's annual Photo Walk held each July.

Staff Report

Residents of both continents capture images of their hometowns from their own perspectives

Last year at this time, The Stand partnered with the community paper in Grahamstown, South Africa, Grocott's Mail, for a journalistic exchange series — Your Town, Our Town.

The idea was born after a team of college and high school students from Syracuse travelled to South Africa last year as part of a special cultural and journalism exchange.

Grocott's Mail and The Stand have continued to exchange stories in an effort to unify, educate and enlighten both communities.

Last July after The Stand held its annual Photo Walk, staff at Grocott's Mail offered its own photography training and walk for local youth in Grahamstown. Local high school pupils, community members and NGO staff joined the Grocott's team for a photography workshop and a walk-through in the community.

The event was modeled off of, and inspired by, the annual Photo Walk held by The Stand.

The majority of youth participating in the Grahamstown walk did not have smartphones but were loaned tablets by Rhodes School of Journalism and Media Studies in Grahamstown to share on the walk.

"We saw everything we usually see in the streets of Joza," one participant told staff at Grocott's using a word for a township in Grahamstown. "But having put on the hat of the photographer, as if by magic, all suddenly looked different. We saw that a small area in an ordinary township can contain endless variations of life, color and beauty, and that if you look carefully, you can capture it in a simple photo."

The goal of both the Syracuse and Grahamstown Photo Walks is to empower residents to take control of the way their community is represented.

On the next page is collection of images from two sides of the globe.

See if you can distinguish which images are from Syracuse's South Side and which are from South Africa.



"Life, color and beauty"

Syracuse and South Africa remain connected through photography workshops documenting everyday life



South Africa: 1B, 2A, 3A, 4B, 5B, 6A

Syracuse: 1A, 2B, 3B, 4A, 5A, 6B

GAINING EXPOSURE



My column, **A Friendly Five**, acts as a lantern to give light to

musicians and singers — mainly African Americans — who, like me, sometimes don't get enough exposure from the larger mainstream publications.

Getting exposure is critical for local artists because it is oftentimes through the media that consumers of the arts form their opinions about an artist's value and worth. It also ties in directly with how often the phone rings, what the opportunities are on the other end and the amount of pay an artist will receive.

Over the past six years, through this A Friendly Five column, I have helped to give exposure to many talented musicians who I feel have been worthy of recognition and the small number of opportunities some may have obtained because of it.

LOOKING BACK

The Stand's music columnist reflects on African Americans' contributions

By | Reggie Seigler
A Friendly Five columnist

February provides opportunity to recognize the impact African Americans have made

It's February again and Black History Month is upon us. BHM is significant because it's a time to honestly reflect on the struggles and perseverance of African Americans in their fight to live with respect and dignity in this land to which they were unwillingly brought.

It is also a time when their sometimes-unheralded contributions in areas of the arts, sciences, sports, religion, politics and philosophy are celebrated.

History is said to be nothing more than things that have happened in the past and the study of it. So, when many of us think of history, particularly American history, what first comes to mind are things that we learned about in school. Commonly we remember things like the invention of the automobile and the air conditioner or maybe things from a little farther back like the invention of photography. We may even reel back to Columbus' first voyage to the "New World."

None of these things however are inclusive of the African American people's experience. So rarely, do we collectively think first of the contributions that African Americans have made throughout our history. Even though black Americans have made numerous contributions, many of which have helped reshape the consciousness of America.

To that end, one contribution by African Americans was "Freedom's Journal." In 1827, Freedom's Journal became the first newspaper in the United States published by African Americans. At the time, when free black men Samuel Cornish and John Brown Russwurm published the paper, it was a criminal offense in many states for enslaved blacks to learn to read. The newspaper's main readership was the 300,000 free blacks residing across 11 U.S. states, Washington D.C., Canada, Haiti and Europe.

Russwurm and Cornish's objectives were to inject fresh thoughts into the consciousness of America through its readers. They wanted to counterbalance the racist and degrading negative stereotypes often depicted of black Americans by non-blacks, who through the media heavily influenced American perspectives. A direct quote from the initial pressing of Freedom's Journal read as follows: "Too long have others spoken for us, too long has the public been deceived by misrepresentations."

Freedom's Journal spoke out against slavery and

other injustices performed against blacks. It encouraged positive black self-identity and highlighted black-autonomy by publishing the announcements of weddings and current events and the biographies of successful black people.

When people examine history, I believe they try to find in it something that they can relate to; something that highlights them in an honorable way. That honor provides them with a proud connection to their roots and fortifies their sense of belonging and purpose.

Dr. Alphonso Sanders said, "Owning one's heritage can give us a noble sense of place in the world. However, the reward may be across the bridge of suffering and pain."

On the flip side: "To that which one has made no contribution, from it nothing is owed."

When people begin to reflect upon history and do not see themselves as having made any honorable contributions, they can begin to feel that they have no sense of belonging and start to question their own purpose. Beyond that, so might others after a while.

That's why I feel that it is so important to celebrate Black History. Albeit only one month in duration it is still a time that we all focus together upon Black History.

Like Cornish and Russwurm, I too like writing about the positive contributions blacks are making in our community and to American culture.

They have made sizeable deposits in many areas, and we've all cashed in on them. Music is one such area. It is widely known and well accepted all over the world that Spiritual, Gospel, Blues, Jazz, Rock and Roll and Hip-Hop music are all original American art forms that emanated from the African-American experience.

Dr. Sanders is the director of the BB King Recording Studio and the BB King Day "Blues" Symposium at Mississippi Valley State University (MVSU).

"The Blues is more than a style of music," he said. "It is the translation of the soul into sound. It is the call and response of a spiritual cry. It is the chanting of the past toward the future. It is the improvisation of survival. It is the paradox of freedom and creativity in suffering and pain. It is the undefinable sounds of bent tones, groans and moans and silence."

He is describing the black experiences through the Middle Passage, slavery, Jim Crow and the Civil Rights Movement and how it manifested itself into the music we refer to as Blues.

I had the opportunity to attend the annual BB King Dau celebration last September. It was held at MVSU in Itta Bena, Mississippi. One might recognize Itta Bena

as being the place where Washington D.C.'s late Mayor Marion Barry was born; or MVSU as the place where Pro Football Hall of Famer, Jerry Rice, played college football.

Fannie Lou Hamer, a once brutally beaten Civil Rights leader and very vocal proponent of black's voting rights, also lived very close to there.

My family, including my two uncles who brought their Gospel group "The Friendly Five," from Clarksdale, Mississippi to Syracuse in the 1950s also came from that same area.

The area is commonly referred to as the Mississippi Delta and is said to be one of the most fertile deltas in the world. I believe that some of the most resilient and soulful people in the world sprout from that soil. As I'd said earlier when people examine history they look for ways to connect personally.

During the day, the Symposium presented Blues heavyweights and academics from all over the South but mainly the Delta. They performed and spoke about the history of the blues and how it derived from the voices of suffering and provided a musical soundtrack to the African American struggle.

The evening events culminated in Indianola, Mississippi at the famous Club Ebony. Club Ebony is an historic black-owned "juke joint" from the old 'Chittlin' Circuit" where the Blues has been nurtured since entre-

preneur Johnny Jones opened it in 1945. All the greats have performed there including Sonny Boy Williamson, Louis Jordan, Denise LaSalle, Bobby Rush, Teeny Tucker, Bobby Bland, Little Milton, Johnny Taylor and the king of the them all, BB King.

Over the years the business changed hands several times finally landing in the hands of Willie and Mary Shephard. When owner Mary Shephard retired in 2008, BB King purchased the club. It is now managed by the BB King Museum, which is just a stone's throw away.

The symposium's evening events unfolded like the following lyrics from an old Robert Cray/BB King song called "Playing With my Friends." (See sidebar)

Bill "Howl-N-Madd" Perry performed with his daughter Sharo "Shy" Perry and his son Bill "little Bill" Perry Jr. Guitarist Ray "Lil Ray Neal" Neal and his brother Larry performed as well. Ray and Larry are the sons of the iconic late Blues-Harpist, Rayful Neal. Jessie "Guitar" Robinson was there and Teeny Tucker gave a thundering rendition of "Natural Woman," in remembrance of Aretha Franklin who had just passed days before.

The evening was just like that 'Catfish' and all.

Have A Friendly Five suggestion?

*Contact Reggie at reggie@softspokenband.com
or (315) 479-9620*

Baptist Church to Host Celebration of World Interfaith Harmony Week

Each year during the first week of February, faith communities across the globe celebrate the diversity that makes them special.

For some, these World Interfaith Harmony Week celebrations take the form of special programs, conferences and other public events. In Syracuse, where the local celebration began nine years ago as World Interfaith Harmony Assembly, organizers decided to move the event around each year to various faith communities. This year, Southern Missionary Baptist Church, located at 3143 Midland Ave., will host the 90-minute program. It begins at 6:30 p.m. Monday, Feb. 4.

First established in 2010 at the United Nations General Assembly by King Abdullah II of Jordan, World Interfaith Harmony Week fosters mutual understanding and inter-religious cohesion to promote harmony between all people, regardless of their faith.



> Members of the Jen and Todd Moss family perform at a past year's World Interfaith Harmony Assembly celebration in Syracuse.
| Photo Provided

In Syracuse, song, dance and literary readings are mainstays of the program.

"This gathering provides our entire community the opportunity to discover the interfaith collective," said Gracious Moyo, InterFaith Works' director of Interfaith Initiatives.

For more information on this event, contact Daryl Files at (315) 449-3552, ext. 208 or email her at dfiles@interfaithworkscny.org.

SONG LYRICS

I'm gonna call up some
of my buddies

And a few of the ladies
I know

I'm gonna rent a hall
and get them all and

Put on a heck of a show

Make sure we got a
kitchen

With a oven and a stove

We'll all get in
there cookin'

Then we'll throw open all
the doors

Playin' with my friends

...

I'm gonna buy a 100
pounds of catfish

Cook it all up on the grill

Fix some beans and
corn bread

Everybody's gonna get
their fill

Then we'll grab all the
guitars

Greasy hands and all

Someone'll count off a
shuffle

And man we'll have a
ball

— Robert Cray/BB King

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