

# the **Stand** south side news

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

Syracuse, NY

**MARCH 2019**

Issue 73

**FREE**

## ONE LOVE

Once anti-marriage, two couples embrace a lifetime of commitment and love

## VOICES OF ANGELS

A Friendly Five column highlights local female vocalists

## Planting Seeds

Rashawn Sullivan discusses parenting as an uncle, mentor to youth

**STRONGER SYRACUSE**  
LaQuan Rouse talks about being named MVP after the Strong's championship win

## FULL STEAM AHEAD

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Irish Bargain Party  
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**SCHOOL AND YOUTH** | Learn about plans to renovate Central High School into a new facility focused on science, technology, engineering, the arts and math.



**COMMUNITY** | See how community members are helping to design a mobile app to serve as both a neighborhood-alert system and community-engagement tool.



**COMMUNITY** | Remember Samuel Adams, a singer and family man who worked at the Southwest Community Center for 42 years.



**FEATURES** | Meet two local couples who were hesitant to get married but finally decided to tie the knot.



**ENTERTAINMENT** | Discover some of Syracuse's musical women, including a former "American Idol" contestant and a trio who sings with the voices of "A.N.G.E.L.S."



**FATHERHOOD** | Hear from Rashawn Sullivan, a mentor for at-risk youth and father-figure to his niece and nephew.



**SPORTS** | Relive the Syracuse Strong's national championship victory against the Virginia Titans at The Sunshine Bowl and meet this year's MVP.

■ Cover photography by Nabiha Asim of Maria Maldonado-Lewis and Keenan Lewis

CALENDAR | MARCH

**What:** Wedge Grafting Techniques & The Politics of Graft  
**When:** 11 a.m. to noon Saturday, March 16  
**Where:** Rahma Edible Forest Snack Garden, 3100 S. Salina St.  
**Details:** San Francisco activist and artist Margaretha Haughwout will visit the South Side's Rahma Edible Forest Snack Garden. She has worked with the Guerrilla Grafters art/activist group and Hayes Valley Farm, an interim-use permaculture green space built on top of a former freeway. She will introduce the wedge grafting techniques and give a brief talk based on her recent essay.  
**Cost:** Free and open to the public  
**More Info:** Learn more at [beforebefore.net/words](http://beforebefore.net/words)

**What:** Nutrition & Health Expo for Seniors  
**When:** 10 a.m. to noon Saturday, March 23  
**Where:** Central New York Regional Market "F" Shed, 2100 Park St.  
**Details:** The event will include a light and healthy breakfast, massages, healthy cooking demos, health screenings and exercise classes  
**Cost:** Free and open to the public  
**To Register:** Call Allison Lawson at (315) 435-2362 ext. 4987 or email [AllisonLawson@ongov.net](mailto:AllisonLawson@ongov.net) by March 15 or for special accommodations

While a swarm of proposals affecting the South Side have been announced, much of the chatter over the past few months seems to center on missed opportunities. From Crouse Hospital's now-canceled Sears building renovation to confusion over where \$200 million from the newly announced Syracuse Surge would be spent to the ongoing quagmire surrounding the future of I-81, there's certainly no shortage of things to discuss.

Mayor Ben Walsh announced the Surge, an initiative to develop Syracuse's workforce for the future digital economy, in this year's State of the City address. He said its signature investment would create The Southside Campus for the New Economy by renovating the former Central High School building and expanding the city's technical educational offerings. Learn more about this proposal on Page 4.

Walsh stressed the way to make a lasting impact here is to provide jobs for our youth.

The takeaway for many leaders and residents on the South Side: \$200,000 would be invested in the neighborhood. But after the speech, updated plans revealed that some of the money will be spent elsewhere in the city. The mayor said in his speech "ripples of opportunity from the South Side will spread to every quadrant of the city."

Community meetings have strived to inform South Side residents on such plans for economic revitalization. How to repurpose the crumbling I-81 viaduct, a restructuring of public housing managed by Syracuse Housing Authority (SHA) and even the canceling of a plan by Crouse Hospital to renovate the former Sears Building have been hot topics.

The city and its residents have known for years that the viaduct was deteriorated and nearing the end of its lifespan. The debate over what to do about it reopened the decades-old wounds caused by its construction and the resulting destruction of the 15th Ward. Years later, what remains is a lack of understanding on just what will happen and when.

For I-81, the Central New York Civil Liberties Union has hired Lanessa Chaplin, project counsel for the Central New York Chapter, to hold regular meetings to inform and collect community input on how the final plan will reshape the neighborhood's landscape.

And with looming construction around the I-81 viaduct, Blueprint 15 was announced to redevelop public housing properties owned and managed by SHA for a neighborhood welcoming all, meaning all income levels and both single and family-friendly units. While hints of redevelopment have been peppered into community meetings over the last few years, a public announcement came last month in a joint partnership with The Allyn Foundation, SHA and the school district. Blueprint 15 states its goal is to restore the neighborhood with a nod to the nostalgia of the old 15th Ward. Yet columnist Ken Jackson, publisher of Urban CNY, called the plans "Negro Removal 2.0."

Finally, public outcry last year withdrew a \$20 million redevelopment deal by Crouse Hospital of the former Sears building. Some feared it would bring drug users in and attract drug dealers to the adjoining corners. Others felt residents never had a chance to fully understand the revitalization plans, depth of offerings — including job creation — and overall impact.

Common in all these instances are meetings, sometimes public, sometimes not, sometimes over the course of several months, or in the case of I-81, several years. Sometimes those meetings generate news coverage, sometimes they do not.

What's clear is that citizens, government and the media all need to work together to ensure those meetings are more inclusive, better attended and bring about a deeper understanding of these projects and their impacts.

Ashley Kang



## PUBLIC MEETING

### ON I-81'S FUTURE

**WHAT:** I-81: Analyzing the Draft Environmental Impact Statement

**WHEN:** Noon to 1:30 p.m.  
Friday, March 8

**WHERE:** Syracuse Center of Excellence, 727 E. Washington St.

**DETAILS:** Barry Lentz, Moving People Transportation Coalition; Bob Haley, American Institute of Architects; and Joe Driscoll, Chair of the Syracuse Common Council Transportation Committee, will present the latest public information on the status of the I-81 Viaduct Project. This presentation will focus on the mandated process for evaluating social, economic and environmental considerations required by various federal and state statutes. The aim of the presentation is to help prepare participants to analyze the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and then how to respond during the public comment period.

**COST:** Free, but registration is required due to limited seating

**TO REGISTER:** Visit Eventbrite.com and search "I-81: Analyzing the Draft Environmental Impact Statement"

## STUDENT CITIZENS

**Corcoran High School** seniors enrolled in the school's **Active Citizenship Class** recently met with Syracuse Mayor Ben Walsh to share their concerns about — and suggestions for — the city of Syracuse.

Issues students brought up included abandoned homes, bringing grocery stores to the city, litter and neighborhood clean-up, violence and poverty.

The course, approved by the Syracuse City School District Board of Education last spring, is intended to help students spend more time engaging in the political process by learning and practicing the necessary skills to be an active citizen.

For one project, students were asked to write letters to Mayor Walsh detailing an issue they are passionate about, a problem they see in the city or a suggestion for an improvement in the city. After letters were received, Walsh visited Corcoran to speak with students directly about their ideas.

# FULL 'STEAM' AHEAD

*Local leaders all aboard on renovations for new science-based academy*



> The former Central High School located at East Adams and Warren streets was designed by Syracuse architect Archimedes Russell and opened in 1903. City students attended for 72 years until its closing in 1975. Now as part of the Syracuse Surge initiative, plans are underway to renovate the long vacant building. | Ashley Kang, The Stand Director

By Quinn Gawronski  
*Staff Reporter*

## Local educators and administrators say better schools can break the poverty cycle in our city

Reclining in one of the plastic chairs facing the stage of Danforth Middle School, Jeffrey Morey thinks back to his own days as student at Central High School, where he graduated in 1959. Morey fondly recalls performances of the now bankrupt Syracuse Symphony Orchestra playing in the Central High School auditorium, especially the popcorn man stationed outside.

Since Morey graduated, Central High has closed and Syracuse's percentage of residents living in poverty has crept steadily upward. In 1969, the U.S. Census Bureau reported 14 percent of city residents living in poverty. As of 2017, that number has more than doubled to 32 percent. That poverty is concentrated in 30 urban neighborhoods in Syracuse, a 2015 report by the Century Foundation concluded.

"Poverty, like wealth, brings more poverty," said Joe

Driscoll, a Syracuse common councilor for District 5. "People get caught in cycles, and they start to exasperate each other."

The school system is one of those contributing factors, Driscoll said. While the Syracuse City School District reported a graduation rate of 61 percent in 2016, by December 2018 the state education department announced the possibility of three Syracuse city schools being taken over by an independent receiver. These are schools the state designates as "struggling." They must make demonstrable improvements to get off the state's watch list or risk being closed permanently.

One of these three schools is Danforth Middle School. The New York State Education Department monitors public schools in Syracuse and puts low-performing schools under state receivership requirements. These requirements mandate that struggling schools demonstrate improvement through nearly 700 indicators.

Richard Richardson, principal of Danforth, stood under the high ceilings and elaborate white woodwork of the auditorium. "This school is infrastructure that can be used, and should be used," he said.

Mayor Ben Walsh recently announced a proposal for





> Southside Community Coalition President Charlie Pierce-El believes the district is improving. | Quinn Gawronski, Staff Photographer

a new regional school to open in the abandoned Central High School. It will offer a science, technology, engineering, arts and math, or STEAM, program. The school would draw from several Syracuse-area school districts, including suburban and urban areas.

At the February meeting of Tomorrow's Neighborhoods Today, a group that seeks to improve the quality of life on the South Side, Morey expressed some doubts about the plans to refurbish the school near the South Side corridor. He said he hopes the effort to bridge urban and suburban communities is successful, but said the district should first update existing schools.

Suburban and urban areas of Syracuse have struggled to mend divisions due to the pervasive notions about each community, said Katherine Sojewicz, a representative on Syracuse City School District's Board of Education.

"We already know that people have a preconceived notion of city children and city education," she said. "What people say comparing the suburbs to the city shows some prevailing notions."

Sojewicz said measures to close the divide between schools have been futile, but this STEAM school is different. The school will offer career and technical education programs alongside an arts education. It will strive to host a diverse student population, including spots for suburban students to enroll. Sojewicz said if she were a suburban parent, she would take full advantage of the opportunity.

Charles Pierce-El, president of the Southside Community Coalition, said there is no reason the school

should not open. Education flourishes in a diverse environment, Pierce-El believes. He said he hopes the new school is successful. Empowering children to experience different cultures and nationalities, he added, can prevent prejudice.

It is a burden to break cycles of poverty that are compounded by a range of factors, but improving education is a good place to start, said Jim Dunaway, head of school at Manlius Pebble Hill.

MPH was ranked as the third best school in central New York for STEM, according to Niche, a school ranking website.

Dunaway said the success of his school is in part thanks to its tuition rate, which ranges from approximately \$13,000 to \$24,000 per year. Those funds go toward hands-on projects, field trips and motivated educators. He acknowledged the high tuition can be daunting for low-income families. Nearly 40 percent of students at MPH receive financial assistance through scholarships or a flexible tuition program, according to the school's website.

Inequality doesn't end when students graduate either, Dunaway added. There is a direct link between SAT scores, college admissions and family income, he said.

"My wife and I make a good income, and my children are smart," he said. "But had my children been in another family, without the advantages they have, including SAT prep courses, they might not have been able to get into these competitive colleges."

Government officials, education commissioners and South Side community leaders alike said they shared the belief that improving and diversifying education is one way to disrupt the rampant cycle of poverty that has beleaguered Syracuse.

"Your castle is what you make of it if you're doing the right things," Pierce-El said. "Your children and our children should be together."



> Jeffrey Morey awaits the Southside Tomorrow's Neighborhoods Today meeting held at Danforth Middle School to discuss funding for upcoming community projects. | Quinn Gawronski, Staff Photographer

## GLOBAL IMPACT

Students at the **Institute of Technology at Syracuse Central** participated in a special civics lesson when they met with professional journalists and advocates from both Syracuse and South Africa March 1 to discuss similarities between U.S. segregation and apartheid.

The special session was an extension of the Newhouse School's **"No Innocence This Side of the Womb — Syracuse and South Africa"** Symposium held Feb. 28. The event worked to confront issues of equality, privilege and justice.

**CNY Reads** has also partnered with Syracuse University to hold community dialogues about Trevor Noah's **"Born a Crime."**

To learn how you can join an upcoming book discussion, visit [cnyreads.org](http://cnyreads.org).



## STARTUP PROGRAM

The 2019 Startup in Residence (STIR), a 16-week remote program in 28 local and state organizations across North America, connects startups with government agencies to co-develop technology solutions for civic challenges.

The city of Syracuse is a government partner and chose three startups for this year's program.

The three winners are:

- **Camino** — to address permit transparency by building a platform allowing permit applicants and city employees to better communicate
- **Vite Labs** — to create a crowdfunding platform to connect low-income renters to people willing to provide short-term, no-interest loans for security deposits
- **Zivics** — to partner with the Trauma Response Team to create neighborhood alerts and grow community involvement

For more on the national STIR program, visit [startupinresidence.org](http://startupinresidence.org)

# NEIGHBORS CONNECT

*Residents come together to brainstorm a mobile app for the community*



> The Trauma Response Team hosts a workshop for mobile app ideas. | Weng Cheong, Staff Photographer

By Weng Cheong  
Staff Reporter

## Trauma Response Team partners with startup to develop an alert system, engagement tool

On a snowy Saturday morning last month, 18 residents gathered at Syracuse Community Connections. Participants helped themselves to some breakfast on one end of the room and took a seat at the tables filled with colored sharpies, black sheets of paper, name tags and stickers.

They were there for a workshop held by the Trauma Response Team (TRT) and the tech start-up Zivics. Most of the attendees were leaders in outreach programs and nonprofits. They all brainstormed ideas for a mobile app designed to send public safety alerts and engage with neighborhoods.

“We want to bring together people from different sides of town and build something for the community,” said TRT Director Timothy Jennings-Bey.

Syracuse had 1,009 violent crimes in 2017, a rate of 705 violent crimes per 100,000 residents, according to data from the FBI. By comparison, New York City has a violent crime rate of 539 for every 100,000 residents, and the average rate is 406 violent crimes per 100,000

residents for American cities over 50,000 people.

Last October, the city put out an official request calling for a better way to not only alert people of crimes nearby, but also help establish better relationships between residents and the city's police.

“Right now, we have gun clusters, and we have a lot of people who are exposed to gun violence,” Jennings-Bey said. “We need to create a platform so that local residents and young people would feel comfortable in having a conversation about the trauma they experience.”

When Syracuse University professor Adam Peruta heard about this initiative, he quickly sent a proposal and was chosen for the mobile app project. Peruta and his company, Zivics, has four months to design the mobile app. Once it's launched, the city gets to use it for three months without charge and decide whether to fund the project. The company is looking into grants to receive more funding.

In collaboration with TRT, Peruta organized three community workshops to collect feedback and ideas from locals.

Peruta proposed the app to include an alert system and a feature that encourages positive engagement and involvement within the community. One idea is to create challenges for residents to complete. For example,



participation in a neighborhood cleanup or attending community events. He suggested a reward system, where app users can earn points for completing such challenges. To brainstorm more ideas, residents split into teams and came up with their own pitches.

Each team wrote their ideas on large sheets of paper taped to the wall. At the end, attendees placed stickers next to ideas that they liked most.

Deborah Frett, a South Side resident, said the app idea is a quick, efficient way to inform residents when anything happens. Instead of hearing about shootings hours or sometimes days later, Frett thought the app can help people respond and get to safety quickly.

"An app is good because everybody is on their cell phones," she said. "When that 'ding' comes in, they'll automatically check on their phones to see what it is."

Frett works at Arc of Onondaga, an organization helping people with disabilities in the community. She also volunteers as a member of Mothers Against Gun Violence. The 52-year-old sees the TRT app as an opportunity to educate families on how to respond to violence. She recommended an event to train kids on how to react when they hear gunshots.

"There are so many shootings nowadays," Frett said. "The kids don't know what to do when they hear a shooting. I'm an adult, and I don't even know what I'd



> Deborah Frett, member of Mothers Against Gun Violence, shares her ideas. | Weng Cheong, Staff Photographer

do. They need a safe spot to go to."

David Hogan, outreach specialist at Syracuse Cure Violence (SNUG), suggested that the neighborhood challenges in the app should coincide with what's happening in the community. Hogan said that neighborhood apps already exist, but the point is to get people to use, engage and build a community through the app.

"Going forward, I just really want to see it happen," Hogan said. "I'd like to see it come together and have it serve its purpose."

## MOBILE APP

Zivics' app is being developed to build a citizen engagement tool for the **Trauma Response Team** to engage residents after traumatic events and encourage residents to interact with their neighborhoods, city employees and community events.

The app will work to:

- Provide emergency alerts
- Build community through shared experiences

## 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



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## DUST OFF YOUR CAMERA

And get snap happy this July

THE STAND's  
10TH ANNUAL  
PHOTO WALK  
coming in 4 months

| Image by Annaliese Perry



## TRAGIC LOSS

**Valerie Crowder**, 54, of Syracuse, was killed Thursday, Feb. 7.

Many in the community mourned her loss and applauded her dedicated work with city students.

According to her obituary, she worked as a teacher's assistant for the Syracuse City School District for more than 35 years, spending most of those years at Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary School and most recently at Webster Elementary School.

She was a life resident of Syracuse. She graduated from Henninger High School and attended Cazenovia College.

Police say she was stabbed to death by her son.

# REMEMBERING SAM

*Southwest Community Center worker served facility for 42 years*



> Sam Adams sings during an open mic night with local, old school R&B funk band Trumptight315 at B&B Cocktail Lounge. Adams viewed the staff and patrons at the former bar as family. | All Images by Ben Cleeton, Staff Photographer

By Greg Munno  
*Newhouse School Advisor*

Samuel Adams' love of music to live on as namesake of center's music studio

When the notebook Oriana Kyles writes her poems in disappeared from the B&B Cocktail Lounge, she considered giving up writing.

Samuel Adams, a friend and a regular at the former B&B Cocktail Lounge where Kyles worked, wasn't hearing it. "F\*\*\* that," he told her. "You got to keep going, keep pushing. It's all still in your head."

Adams always supported her, Kyles said, more than anyone. He would coax her up on stage to read a poem, then give her props afterward.

"I confided to Sam. I cried in front of Sam," Kyles said of Adams, whom she knew since childhood through her mother, and then bonded with on opposite sides of the counter at the B&B. "And he protected me. He let guys know someone was looking out for me. 'That's my baby girl; I know her momma,' he'd tell them."

Adams died unexpectedly in early January at the

*His favorite bands:*

***The Commodores  
& the Temptations***

age of 62. Friendly, energetic and reliable, people knew Adams as a talented singer, supportive friend and long-time jack-of-all trades for the Southwest Community Center, where he worked for 42 years. His employer is a community staple, open for the past 43 years.

Adams was often the first person to unlock the center in the morning and lock it back up again at night, said Lawrence Williams, executive director of Syracuse Community Connections, which runs the center.

"Sam was instrumental here, a critical piece in making things happen," Williams said. "He knew every inch of this 26,000-square-foot building, and he could fix anything — inside or out."

### WATCH SAM ADAMS SING

Visit the online story at [mysouthsidestand.com](http://mysouthsidestand.com) to watch Adams sing with the local band Trumptight315 during open mic night at B&B Cocktail Lounge prior to the bar's closing in December of 2017







Williams signed a proclamation Jan. 18 naming the center's music studio the "Sam Adams Sound Studio."

Sharon Owens, Syracuse deputy mayor and a former director of the center, said Adams was beloved by many on the South Side.

"He had a wonderful voice, soulful, and loved old-school songs," Owens said. "And he was the person to call. He knew how to fix problems and lived right down the street from the center. He was always there for the center, for people in general."

Adams' favorite song was Sam Cooke's "A Change is Gonna Come," said his son Sam "Monnie" Adams.

"He loved that song, and all sorts of music, but especially groups like the Commodores and the Temptations," he added.

Monnie is one of Adams' four sons. He is also survived by his wife, a daughter, and 25 grandchildren, according to his obituary.

That Kyles and Adams become friends at the B&B was no accident — he lived in an apartment next to the lounge. He was there the night it opened in 1989, and the night it closed 28 years later in 2017.

Ben Cleeton, a freelance photographer who contributes to The Stand, became friends with Adams at the B&B. People at the lounge saw Adams as family, and the feeling was mutual, Cleeton saw.

"There was a mini-family there that Sam helped build and nourish," Cleeton said. "People loved him. He had a great personality, and people looked forward to him signing. Sometimes he would take the microphone at an open mic, and others he just burst out in song at the bar."

Kyles used the word family, too.

"Every Sunday I worked he brought me a plate of food as if I was his child," she said. "He was a wonderful cook, and he liked that I would try almost anything. He even got me to try chicken feet."



> Top, Adams sits at the bar while Oriana Kyles bartends. Above and at left, family and friends attend the Jan. 18 dedication when the Southwest Community Center's music studio was named the "Sam Adams Sound Studio." Four of Adams' children accepted the award in his honor.



# Love Found



> Keenan Lewis and Maria Moldanado-Lewis Facebook livestream while hosting their “I Know I Can Radio” show together. The married couple has hosted the program for the past three years. | Nabiha Asim, Staff Photographer

By Nabiha Asim  
*The Stand Intern*

**At first they didn’t believe in marriage. Fate had other plans, changed their perceptions.**

**T**he trend of more and more young adults waiting to get married continues, according to a 2018 U.S. census report. The nation saw a 30 percent decrease in the numbers of young couples tying the knot over the last 40 years. Although large percentages of married and unmarried couples say love is an important reason to get married, as well as wanting to make a lifelong commitment, according to the Pew Research

Center, less of them are pursuing the lifestyle.

With roughly 50 percent of Americans marrying, does that mean less love is in the air? Maybe for some, but not for these local couples who are proving that true love still exists. While they may not have always been pro-marriage, they have since embraced the lifestyle.

## THE LEWISES

Maria Maldonado-Lewis decided to start a radio program after she became upset upon hearing a radio personality’s negative response to someone having marriage troubles. She says that day she heard God saying that she should start her own show. For three years now,



she and her husband, Keenan Lewis, have empowered the community together, offering positivity, humor and funky tunes.

Keenan, 40, and Maria, 41, have been attached since the day they met in 2007, but individually were never keen on the idea of marriage. Both grew up exposed to toxic relationships and thus didn't see hope for themselves when it came to marriage.

"We both were afraid to get married," Maria said. "We both came from households where we didn't see healthy marriages, so that took us away from wanting to get married."

They were even reluctant to start a romantic relationship. Maria explained that Keenan was not her type when they first met. By fate — or as they explain it, by God's plan — they met one night outside a club and instantly clicked.

"When we first met, it was our conversation that made us just connect. It became a friendship. We both said we're going to be nothing but friends," she said.

Although it was a "just friends" agreement, they ended up falling in love.

"Ups and downs and ins and outs, makeups and breakups of relationships come to the point where like you know how you feel about this person regardless of other things you're going through," Keenan said. "You know you want to be with this person in the end, and the only person you want to be with regardless of the things that may not work out or not see eye to eye on."

With that realization, they decided to get serious.

"We're people who are trying our best to change the dynamic of our families and the ways that they think," Maria said. "We wanted to show them that marriage wasn't bad, so that was part of it."

The dynamic had already been shifting as Maria began to see Keenan as a family man.

"The first time I started to catch true love feelings is when he came to my son's soccer game and started going to his boxing matches," she said. "My son yelled out 'Bye, dad' one day and I knew this was a man I wanted in his life."

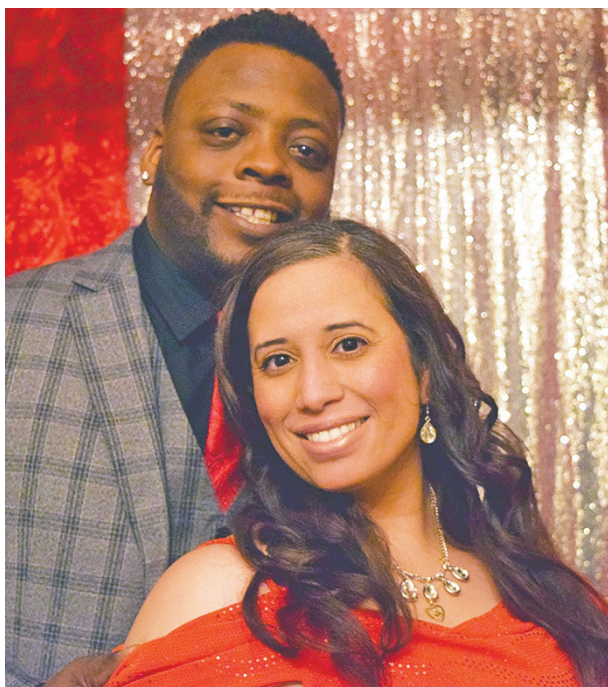
Keenan said it was probably the same for him. Not only did he want Maria in his life, but also Maria's son. So the night he proposed, Keenan asked Maria's son, Antwan Days, for her hand in marriage.

"Because we both had that mindset of being afraid of marriage, I didn't think he was going to propose. So that was way far out of my mind," Maria said.

Keenan says the proposal was a year and a half in the making. He waited until Days' graduation party to propose.

"I knew he was going to be leaving for the Marines and that was going to be a big loss for Maria," he said. "It was also a way of letting her know I was here for her."

They say the number one factor that played a part



> Maria and Keenan pose for a photo Feb. 8 during the Romance at the Mansion event for married couples where they enjoyed a candle-lit dinner, dancing and Biblical guidance for marriage at the Barnes Hiscock Mansion. | Nabiha Asim, Staff Photographer

in their marriage is God. Two weeks before the day they met, Maria asked God — even though she wasn't ready at that moment — to open her eyes and open her husband's eyes to her. Keenan also had a similar conversation with himself not long before. They explain it wasn't love at first sight, but God's destined plan for them to meet.

Despite their deep admiration for one another, they weren't in a hurry to say their vows at first, though they thought a lot about marriage. Keenan and Maria went to church and sought out marriage classes and counseling to make sure they were doing the right thing.

"You know, getting us in church really made us understand love and really understand being able to love your spouse like God loves the church," Maria said. "We definitely can't leave that out because that's the number one thing that has kept us together."

Still, Keenan said that it's important to not want to get married for reasons such as marrying because of kids or wanting to have a house together.

"Our motivation was purely based on the feelings we had for each other," he said.

Their example of love had a trickle-down effect. They noticed that ever since getting engaged, everyone around them started to make such a commitment. They believe by showing stability and happiness in their relationship, they are changing their family dynamic for the better.

"I think it helped them to believe in love all over again," Maria said.

## TUNE IN

Listen to *I Know I Can Radio* hosted by Keenan Lewis and Maria Maldonado-Lewis at 7 p.m. each Thursday evening on WVOA-FM, [wvoaradio.com](http://wvoaradio.com) or Facebook Live with Maldonado-Lewis



> Rondell and Tatiana Parker love to travel. Their first trip was to New York City. The destination has become a tradition. Their favorite thing to do is go to the West Indian Day Parade in Brooklyn. They say it serves as a reminder of their relationship as well as a time to relax and spend time together. | Nabiha Asim, Staff Photographer

## THE PARKERS

Rondell Parker finally got Tatiana Nobles to come over to his apartment after seven years of asking. For several years, whenever he'd ask her to stop by, their conversations would abruptly stop.

"Cat and mouse game," Rondell said. "It went on like that for years."

They dated for two years in the beginning but then broke up. However, Rondell persisted. He'd message her on Facebook asking how she is, wishing her happy birthday and liking pictures. At times when he thought he had a chance, she would just slip away, ghosting him.

"Generally, I just wanted to see her, but it probably wasn't the right time, right place, right circumstance," Rondell said.

He was right to think that then, but years later, they ran into each other. Impressed with his new style and aura, Tatiana decided to call him.

Once again, he asked her to come over. Staying true to her pattern, Tatiana tried giving as many excuses as she could, including having to cook dinner and taking care of her baby girl.

This time, Rondell didn't accept any excuses. He told her to bring the baby because he was already cooking dinner.

"When I walked into his apartment, all I could remember was that it was so warm and inviting," Tatiana said. "It was good energy."

Since then, the couple has been inseparable.

The pair first met in 2005 as neighbors but didn't marry until four years ago. They explained that they were both non-traditional; living independent lifestyles, pursuing their passions. They say their commonalities are what made them fall in love with each other.

"She was sitting on the couch studying and she had three or four books around her and coffee," Rondell said. "Just going to town, talking to me, talking on the phone, studying at the same time. I was just sitting there saying 'wow.' I loved to hang with her just to watch her study."

He said that he hadn't seen a woman that focused before.

"I think we both fell in love with each other's gifts," Rondell said.

Tatiana agreed, saying she admired how focused Rondell was with his music.

"He's a DJ so he had his computer, his turntables, his crates and records and his headphones on," she said. "Just his focus; the music matching up the beats and seeing how it sounded, like that, I was like 'Oh my God.' It was attractive."

She added that not only did they appreciate the other's talents, they learned together. Rondell began to pick up books; Tatiana confessed to having broken a couple needles on the turntable.

While Tatiana said that she wasn't hearing wedding bells right away, Rondell said he always knew she would become his wife.

"I always say it's divine," he said. "I always say God told me because I knew 100 percent when I met her, the first day."

They say Rondell had been proposing for years but Tatiana kept running. She was oblivious to all his signals. So, he finally proposed one night with DIY paper rose petals, hearts and leaves, receiving help from Tatiana's daughter, Amari.

He used them to decorate each floor of the apartment building and waited for her to return the next morning. As she climbed each floor, she read one-by-one "Will you marry me?"

"I walked in and they were up," Tatiana said. "They looked exhausted. Then he pulled out the ring. I was like 'What's going on? Why do you guys look like zombies at 5 in the morning?'"

She says true love is very real but it doesn't come ready-made. She explains that sometimes she doesn't like Rondell, and sometimes he doesn't like her, but they always remember that they love each other.

"This is not just a thing. This is 'the' thing and I'm blessed I am able to experience it," Tatiana said. "People get married, people fall in love, but to have that altruistic just love, love, love, it's a beautiful thing."



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## 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 years, through this 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.

# WOMEN IN MUSIC

*Four vocalists share how their lives run on more than just musical talent*



> Marlea "Rooee" Stroman with her children. From left to right, Violette, 7; Aiden, 15; Graham, 2, and Westin, 11. At the age of 21 as a new mother she tried out and advanced to the finals on the fourth season of "American Idol." She later left the show to return home to family. | Ben Cleeton, Staff Photographer

By Reggie Seigler  
*A Friendly Five columnist*

### In honor of Women's History Month, our music columnist spotlights women artists

In honor of Women's History Month, we decided to focus A Friendly Five Column on musical women in our community. The following are two spotlights on women who are more than just musicians.

#### ONCE AN 'AMERICAN IDOL' CONTESTANT

Robert Stroman is the father of 10, five boys and five girls. He worked at Niagara Mohawk/National Grid until retiring in 2003, putting eight of the 10 through private school. His wife, Diane, was a homemaker. Diane spent much of her time participating in the kids' school activities and raising them into responsible adults.

"They participated in a lot of activities coming up," Robert said. "We had one or two in the choir, a saxophone player and, I think, maybe two clarinet players. They were also into sports. Rooee played soccer and ran track for Faith Heritage School. She still holds a record there."

Rooee is Robert and Diane's second oldest. "She was good," he said. "I think it'll be a long time before somebody breaks her record."

"She was also a good singer," he went on to say. "We knew Rooee could sing when she did a couple of solos at the church." The family attended Syracuse Alliance Church on Midland Avenue.

Rooee knew that she liked singing since she was about 11 years old.

"I was shy, so I would sing softly to myself," she remembers. "But I noticed that I could sing like Whitney Houston."

She took voice lessons and sang in the school's choir. In 10th grade she was given the chance to sing a solo. The Stroman clan was right there to hear her sing "His Eye is on the Sparrow." It is a popular church song that Whitney Houston had also sung and recorded it before.

Rooee's given name is Marlea (pronounced Marley) Stroman. You may recognize it because she was a contestant on the fourth season of "American Idol" in 2005. At 21, she had made it to the show's second round and was offered the "Golden Ticket" to move on to Hollywood.

"It was an interesting and exciting experience but an emotional one at the same time," she said. "We were in Washington D.C., in this large arena-like room. There were all these people around — and nobody really knew what was going on and no one was really talking to you. A few of the contestants were fun, but most were a little standoffish."

Rooee sang Bonnie Raitt's "All at Once." Simon



Cowell, known for his occasionally harsh critiques, told her she was “great, really, really good.” He went on to say she needed to inject “a bit of life” in her songs. Randy Jackson, another judge on the panel, said that she should focus on performing more contemporary songs.

Rooee thinks that Cowell and the other panelists’ comments were fair. Yet in the moment her mind drifted somewhere else. By then she had known that she really didn’t want to be there. She felt that it was like being on an emotional roller-coaster that she didn’t want to ride. So, she walked away.

Robert said that all her family and friends had been pulling for her. They all felt that she should’ve gone ahead because she had “nothing to lose.” He admits that he felt a little let down when she walked away.

“My son had a tape of the show,” he said, “and for a long time I couldn’t even watch it.”

Finally, after a few years, his son got him to take a look. When he saw it, he said he couldn’t stop laughing.

“You meet a lot of strangers when you’re in those types of situations. And when they don’t make it, it becomes emotional. That’s her. Rooee loves people and she felt sorry for them when they didn’t make it. It was an emotional experience for her, and she just got fed up.”

Beyond being “American Idol” contestant #27294, Rooee had another life calling that was tugging at her heart. She was a mom. Rooee had a young baby at home and longed to be with him.

She had felt the love of nurturing parents when she was coming up and knew the importance of it. She had also gotten a glimpse of all the hard work and potential sacrifice of values that it took to become the next “American Idol.” She felt it wasn’t for her.

“Everybody wants the best for their children, but money doesn’t buy happiness,” Robert said. “All Rooee wanted to do was be a mom and be a great wife. She’s absolutely a good mother; I call her the Mother Hen.”

Rooee is married to Brandon Hergenhan. Her son, Aiden Retzos, whom she left the competition to be with is now 15. He plays the shooting guard position on the basketball team at Faith Heritage School and is averaging 22.6 points per game. She attends all his games, and also has three other children ages 11, 7 and 2 that she is very proud of.

These days most people can find her taking care of hungry lunch customers at Original Italian Pizza at 489 James St. Her smile and charm are the personality of the place. She’s been there for nine years and knows a lot of the customers by name. She loves all of them and the people she works with.

On the days she’s not at the restaurant, she cleans

private residences. “I get my referrals by word of mouth and through my customers at OIP. I like the idea of helping other people get things in order,” she said.

She still likes singing and wouldn’t mind following up on an opportunity or two, but she knows it must feel right. She has gotten some phone calls. One was from popular local band Brownskin. She loves the band, but didn’t feel ready for the commitment.

Rooee has recorded a couple of commercials, too.

## “I call her the Mother Hen”

— Robert Stronman,  
Marlea ‘Rooee’ Stroman’s father

One was for Disney’s “Beauty and the Beast” and the other for Gillette. She also sung the national anthem at a Syracuse Crunch game.

But she is happiest to be a mom. “Being a mom is the most joy I find in life. I don’t spend time thinking about shoulda- coulda-woulda,” she said. “I focus more upon my faith and growing stronger in the Lord. I trust in God’s plan for my life and believe that he will lead me in my purpose.”

### TRIO OF A.N.G.E.L.S.

Everyone has heard of angels. Many believe they are those benevolent heavenly beings appointed by God to watch over the world supplying doses of his Grace in just the right measures. Some feel they even have angels assigned to them personally. We’ve all heard the stories about near miss accidents where someone should’ve been severely hurt or killed but just in the nick of time something stepped in to change the circumstances. That something, according to those who believe, is an angel.

We use the word angel at other times too. Often-times, in reference to kind and caring people who are upright in character and stature as angels. Some believe there are no angels.

Regardless your beliefs; Alice “Queen” Olom, SeQuoia “Iman” Kemp and Tah’leece Norris are A.N.G.E.L.S., A New Generation Eternally Lifting Souls. When Olom, 22, first arrived in Syracuse to study political science at Le Moyne College, she found that there wasn’t a suitable outlet on campus for her to express herself musically. She had just graduated from Celia Cruz Bronx High School of Music and was looking to fulfill her passion for singing. She learned Le Moyne previously had a college/community gospel choir called Voices of Praise, which was now defunct. So, she recruited others to form a new group.

Norris, 22, was one them. Also hailing from the Bronx, Norris, who likes to go by “Taye,” said she

## BROTHERS IN SONG

**What:** Morehouse College Glee Club Performance

**When:** 7:30 p.m.  
Wednesday, March 13

**Where:** Bethany Baptist Church, 149 Beattie St.

**Details:** Founded in 1911, the Glee Club has a long tradition of significant public appearances, including Martin Luther King Jr.’s funeral, President Jimmy Carter’s inauguration, Super Bowl XXVIII and the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta. This local performance is offered with support from **100 Black Men of Syracuse**, Syracuse University, CNY Arts and the Rotary Club of Syracuse.

**Cost:** Free and open to the public but seating is limited

**More Info:** Visit [100blackmensyr.org](http://100blackmensyr.org)

## LEADING LADY



**Joan Hillsma**, noted musician, music teacher, author and

music historian, will hold special events for **Music in Our Schools Month** throughout March and offer a Spring Concert later in April.

**The Music in our Schools Month** will feature workshops and roundtable discussions. Keep an eye out for a list of activities and dates. For more information, contact Hillsman at [JHillsman@twcny.rr.com](mailto:JHillsman@twcny.rr.com) or call (315) 373-0805.

Her annual **Spring Concert** will be held 7:30 p.m. Friday, April 12, at Hendricks Chapel on the Syracuse University campus. The concert includes various genres of music, dance and public recognition awards. It is free and open to all.

Hillsman leads a city-wide performing group that offers opportunities to youth and adults in music. She connects as a board member with 141 chapters of the Gospel Music Workshop of America and is looking for participants in the Syracuse chapter. She has received an international women's award for her contributions to society as well as eight community awards.



> A.N.G.E.L.S., A New Generation Eternally Lifting Souls, performed during the Jan. 27 Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration at the Carrier Dome to a crowd of 5,000. | Image: Evan Jenkins ©2019 Syracuse University

wanted to join because of her love for music.

"I've always been a singer," she exclaimed.

Four years ago, Elder Melvin Baker, 38, knew that Le Moyne, a Jesuit college, might need non-Catholic, jumped right in and took on a leadership role of singing praise and worship. That is when they came up with the name A.N.G.E.L.S.

After going through a couple changes of members, Olom and Norris connected with Kemp. Kemp is from Syracuse and grew up Christian. Her grandfather is a preacher, and her uncle, Lesley Gilmore, is a local pastor.

"I liked singing with the group because we all had a common faith and love for God," she shared.

"Although the group doesn't always sing gospel, the songs are always uplifting, and we all have a love for the Lord. That's what makes it work," Norris said.

Olom graduated from Le Moyne in 2018. Before graduation she completed an honors project. The project, a 14-song story album, is about a mother's navigation through the world after the death of her young son. It was inspired by the death of Trayvon Martin.

Elder Baker praised the honors project recording because he feels that it speaks to the consciousness of America and exposes its inadequacies.

"It's sobering, and it challenges us to think about the injustices in society as they really are," Baker said. "It is also put together very beautifully. It has a great music track and showcases healthy doses of the girls just downright singing. They're gifted."

He went on, saying their gifts made room for them.

Kemp heard that Syracuse University would be hosting its 34th Annual Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration and were looking for artists interested in

performing. The opportunity excited her, so she told the group about it.

"I didn't think it would really happen," Olom said, "but I gave Iman the OK to submit a video from my honors project. They liked it so we were selected to perform. We performed one of the songs from it titled 'Say Their Names.'"

"Say Their Names" mimicked the melody of a 1968 song written by Dick Holler called "Abraham, Martin and John," as recorded by Marvin Gaye. The song was originally written to give honor to slain leaders Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King Jr. and John and Robert Kennedy. A.N.G.E.L.S.' song has a similar meaning; it pays tribute to Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown and other young, black men who have been killed.

Charles "C Jack" Jackson, a music producer and presenter of local talent, has had A.N.G.E.L.S. perform in his past showcases.

"Their performance at the MLK Celebration was on-time and powerful," he said. "As they were singing the names of the slain black youth, their pictures were being cast upon the large screens. It really touched people."

The future of this group is in limbo since Olom and Norris have graduated college. Kemp wants to take the group into the studio to work on more music and videos, while Norris said that she doesn't know what direction the group will take now.

"I'll let the Lord decide," she said.

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



# Rashawn Sullivan

*Uncle serves as father-figure to his niece & nephew*

By Ashley Kang  
The Stand Director

**Q: How did you become a 'father figure' to your niblings?**

A: It's like this because I didn't have that when I grew up. My niece's father is currently incarcerated, so I have to take on that role. With my nephew Desire Sullivan, 11, his father is not active so it naturally becomes my responsibility. And that is how the cycle of life works. So now I get a chance to do (for) somebody what no one did for me. I see it too as the opportunity to be a father before I become a father.

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

A: I grew up without a father. Really, I raised myself while I was incarcerated for all those years. (Sullivan spent the ages of 17 to 34 in prison.) I didn't meet him until age 34 when I was released. I believe that was provided by the universe; I don't believe accidents just happen. He's been living in Atlanta for the past 26 years but happened to be in Syracuse. My uncle saw him and knew the situation, so I did get to meet him. But we are not in touch. He has a deep alcohol problem and his life has veered off. It takes two to make something work, but because his addiction has distanced himself from even knowing what he wants of his life, it would be hard for us to truly connect at this time. There's no stability there, so that's another reason that I know it is not the proper time for us to connect. I'm not upset or angry about it. I understand that life teaches in ways that are unique to you.

**Q: Tell me about your niece and nephew?**

A: Desire is very charismatic. He's the ladies' man, and he's a great dancer. Even at this young age, he has a unique way of intuitively understanding life. He's also artistic. Then what I see in my niece, Kadnec Kearse, is her character is going to be really flexible. Her hidden talent is her flexibility, but it's also there on the inside. She has a natural ability to be flexible with her body and is a contortionist. And I tell her that while flexibility is her physical gift it's in her character too. What's within you is also without you. I let her know that she's going to be flexible in life.

**Q: What advice do you give them?**

A: Kadnec answers: He tells me that I'm going to attend college and become a star. *Rashawn goes on:* My focus with them is to teach the importance of earning an education. Right now they can see me in school and know that is their next step after graduating high school.



**MEET RASHAWN:** Sullivan, 38, is the founder of iApologize Foundation, a mentoring and anti-violence nonprofit. In addition to helping local youth, he dedicates much of his time to serve as a father-figure to his niece and nephew. Here he Facebook livestreams this interview with his niece Kadnec Kearse, 9, to expand his mentoring message. | Kai Nguyen, Staff Photographer

**Q: How do you balance your job, school and life with also making the time to spend quality time with them?**

A: I just write out my schedule. My schedule starts at 5 a.m. with prayer, followed by reading and meditation, then by 6:10 a.m. I get my nephew up. I walk him to his bus stop by 7 a.m. and then I'm off to school. I schedule it all into my OCC notebook. I follow and write in that schedule every day.

**Q: What advice can you offer to others on how to serve as a role model?**

A: The person first has to work on themselves. Once you help yourself, then you're going to naturally want to do that for others. Educate yourself first and see the good in it — that good feeling that you get from that — will then make you want to pass that on to other people.

**Q: Final thoughts?**

A: To every man out there, I want you to be a man in your own household. Meaning, take on the responsibility of raising. Don't take penitentiary chances where you'll be out of your kids' lives.

## TEAM TRYOUTS

If interested in joining the National Championship-winning Syracuse Strong team, go to tryouts being held from 2 to 4 p.m. Saturday, March 30, at the Valley Sports Complex, 100 Amidon Drive.

Tryouts require a \$20 non-refundable registration fee.

For more information, inbox the team on Facebook at "Syracuse Strong Football."

# CHAMPIONSHIP WIN

*Syracuse Strong Football Team Crowned as National Champions*

By Nabiha Asim  
*The Stand Intern*

[Syracuse's minor league football team took home its second championship after a 32-0 win](#)

The Syracuse Strong won a national championship in January when they beat the Virginia Titans in the Sunshine Bowl in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

The Strong dominated the game 32-0.

"We went out with 27 guys kind of nervous, but everyone stepped up and got the job done," Head Coach Ed Watkins said. "It was my first national championship with this team and that was great."

Wide Receiver LaQuan Rouse was declared MVP of the game after scoring two touchdowns.

"It was my first time actually winning the championship," Rouse said. "I was pretty excited and then being called the MVP of the game, I mean it was a great feeling."

It was Rouse's first year with the team and he showed he has talent.

"We have a lot of talent," Watkins said. "Every game it could be someone different and in that game it happened to be his shining moment. Two touchdowns, over a hundred yards a season; it was his night."

While the team expected the game to be competitive, they knew after the first couple of plays that the championship was theirs.

"The third play of the game, we were offense, and our running back ran for about a 65-yard touchdown," Cornerback Ishmiek Allen said. "The other team fell apart. They start arguing with each other. You can tell we took their minds in the first three play of the game. That was a big moment for us."

The Strong seemingly breezed through the season and championship game, only losing one game enroute to Florida. But they didn't take the Sunshine Bowl for granted and stayed focused on winning throughout the lopsided game, Assistant Offensive Line Coach Nathan Sinn said.

"We had been more competitive than we have been in years past," he added.

This was the Strong's third national bowl game and second championship. The team has only existed for four years. Watkins says the reason the team has been so successful is its dedication. He explained that they don't get paid and take time from their families to practice. He also said the age diversity of the players is something noteworthy: 21 to 36.

"To get guys like that to come together and win the championship is really unique," Watkins said.



> Championship game MVP LaQuan Rouse holds his trophy and is hoisted up in celebration after the Syracuse Strong's victory. | Provided Photo



> Syracuse Strong players show off the national championship trophy. | Provided Photo



# Q&A with MVP

*LaQuan Rouse plays for the 'love of the game'*

By Mike Zawisza  
The Stand Reporter

*Q: First of all, congrats on the big win.*

A: Thank you man, thank you. I appreciate it.

*Q: So, how was Florida?*

A: Florida was great. I love it down there. Weather was beautiful.

*Q: I bet. I know you were down there for business, but did you get a chance to relax?*

A: Well yeah. Some of the guys left right away, but a few of us stayed around. It was great man. I was born and raised in Syracuse so it was a different feeling down there.

*Q: How did you find your way to the Syracuse Strong?*

A: I played football in high school, and I was pretty skilled. My family was always telling me to stick with it. Then I graduated, had a daughter and I had to play that role of being a father. So, I got a job at Costco. I worked construction, too. I worked a bunch of things like that. I got to a point where I felt like I was comfortable. I tried out for a team called the Ithaca Warriors. A couple years later, some friends convinced me to come back home to play here and I did.

*Q: Was it hard transitioning back to the game?*

A: I guess, but you know I wanted to step up and be a father. I never had a dad when I was growing up. So I put the game aside and took responsibility. I wanted to be the father that mine never was.

*Q: Congrats. Ringing in her first year with a big trophy, huh?*

A: (laughs) My oldest [daughter] is really excited. She keeps showing off the picture of me holding the trophy, saying, "Look at daddy!"

*Q: Does something like that motivate you?*

A: Yeah for sure. I try to be the best role model for them. She's always supporting me from the stands. My nephews too.

*Q: There's this stereotype about wide receivers, how they're always divas and they want the ball all the time, but you seem so humble. Is there any diva in you?*

A: Nah, I mean I want the ball, don't get me wrong. But I've got teammates, you know? Other wide receivers can be playing well, or the running game can get into a rhythm and I kind of just step back and wait for my time. Like in the championship, I only had two catches. Two catches and two touchdowns. I knew my time was going to come, and I made the plays. That's what it's about.



> LaQuan Rouse, Syracuse Strong wide receiver, was named MVP after the team won the championship against the Virginia Titans in The Sunshine Bowl. | Kai Nguyen, Staff Photographer

*Q: Two catches, two touchdowns, and the MVP. That's pretty clutch, man.*

A: When the coach calls your number, you do what you do. That's what I tell myself during the game.

*Q: What now? Any big aspirations? Hopes and dreams?*

A: Keep playing, keep winning championships and keep winning MVPs.

*Q: Come on, you're not hoping to be picked by a scout?*

A: I mean, yeah that'd be dope. I'll keep playing and seeing where this takes me. I know I have the skill and some tools. But I do it for the love of the game, ... (pauses) But I wouldn't be against being seen by a scout (laughs).

*Q: Offseason plans?*

A: Stay in shape, watch what I eat. We've got a real short offseason — we start right back up this month, so I got to be ready. You can always get better, bigger, faster, stronger.

*Q: Family, workouts, practice, work. How do you find time?*

A: I do the best I can. I'm working at Loretto now — it's like a nursing home — and they're flexible with me. I just got a lot of people on my side. I'm thankful for my aunts, family and friends. They saw this talent and skill in me in high school and they encouraged me. I try to keep good people around me. I do the best that I can, like I said.



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