

the Stand

south side news

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Syracuse, NY

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Issue 74

FREE

NEW CHAPTER

After 43 years with The Media Unit, Walt Shepperd retires, closes studio

Chief Speaks

In an exclusive interview, Kenton Buckner discusses plans for police department

Rooted in activism

Aggie Lane tells The Stand why she made the diverse South Side community home

BIG-HEARTED BIKE GUY

New columnist profiles a neighborhood bicycle enthusiast

A NEW VOICE ON I-81



INSIDE | APRIL

the
Stand

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SPECIAL THANKS THIS MONTH

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■ Cover photography of Walt Shepperd contributed by William Gandino

CALENDAR | APRIL

What: Third-annual McKinley Park Easter Egg Hunt
When: 10 a.m. Saturday, April 13
Where: McKinley Park, 398 W. Calthrop Ave.
Details: Bring your basket and arrive at 10 a.m. sharp
Cost: Free

What: SALTspace Grand Opening Celebration
When: Noon to 10 p.m. Saturday, April 13
Where: SALTspace, 103 Wyoming St.
Details: The all-day event will feature the talents from within Syracuse, highlight local businesses and organizations
Cost: Free

What: Salt City Market Information Session
When: 10 to 11:30 a.m. Saturday, April 20
Where: Thelikeminded, 2223 S. Salina St.
Details: Salt City Market is hosting an informal information session on how to start a food business. Interested attendees should bring questions. Coffee and pastries will be provided.
Cost: Free
More Info: To RSVP, contact Adam Sudmann, market manager, at (315) 748-5001 or visit Saltcitymarket.com

In this issue, read highlights from The Stand's exclusive one-on-one Q&A exchange with Syracuse's new police Chief Kenton Buckner, whose arrival has been met with tension from some officers and their union, the Police Benevolent Association.

Change is inevitability met with resistance, and to show the community's support for the chief, the Syracuse Chapter of the National Action Network held a meeting in March.

"We will not tear each other down before we get to know each other," said Twiggy Billue, NAN president and organizer of the gathering.

Buckner sat down with The Stand's founder, Steve Davis, in February to share his plans to reorganize the department, increase minority recruitment and expand community partnerships. A transcript of the full 100-minute interview can be viewed online at MySouthSideStand.com.

For our cover story, I spoke with former Media Unit alumni who recount their memories of working with Walt Shepperd over the last 43 years.

The future of the I-81 Project continues to raise concerns locally for how the construction will impact residents. On Page 8, learn why The Central New York Chapter of the New York Civil Liberties Union has become involved. On Page 16, meet long-time neighborhood advocate Aggie Lane who has been working with the Urban Jobs Task Force to increase the number of minorities working in the trades. On The Stand's website, read about the group's year-long study on this topic that found disparities in the number of workers on five recent, local construction projects. UJTF will hold additional meetings on its findings and recommendations in the coming weeks.

Our Fatherhood Q&A series continues on Page 19 with Tyrone Dixon, who shares how much love his daughter Abigail has brought to his life.

Readers can always nominate a dad — or male serving as a father-figure in a child's life — to be spotlighted. Email me at ashley@mysouthsidestand.com or mail a letter to The Stand, 2331 S. Salina St., Syracuse NY 13205.

The Stand is delighted to add long-time columnist Jeff Kramer as a new contributor. In his very first piece, he introduces readers to the South Side's bike guy, Anthony Compasso, who for decades has provided bikes, replacement parts and tune-ups to local riders in need. Read Kramer's first piece on Page 6. Readers are also welcome to share suggested story ideas with Kramer. Call him at (315) 420-2619 or email jeffmkramer@gmail.com.

Ashley Kang



READ MORE ONLINE

Visit MySouthSideStand.com for several local stories not featured here in print. While the South Side Newspaper Project publishes a print issue eight times a year, the website is updated each week with meeting coverage, upcoming events and more.

BUILDING EQUITY

Read how The Urban Jobs Task Force and Legal Services of Central New York released a study on creating equitable jobs in the construction trades, especially in regards for future I-81 construction work.

LEADERS RECOGNIZED

Learn which two South Side community leaders were awarded the 2019 Dan and Mary Lou Rubenstein Social Justice Award, recognizing their commitment to service while honoring their status as advocates and role models here in Syracuse.

EMPOWERING EVENT

An annual conference for young African-American women empowerment celebrated its 15th consecutive year, both highlighting issues and finding solutions to the problems specifically faced by women of color.

ON THE SIDE MAYOR CONNECTION

For 22 years, The Media Unit's studio was at 327 Montgomery St. with upgrades made as special funding was obtained.

In 2010, The Downtown Committee awarded the unit a NY Main Street façade grant with the stipulation that a formal lease had to be in place.

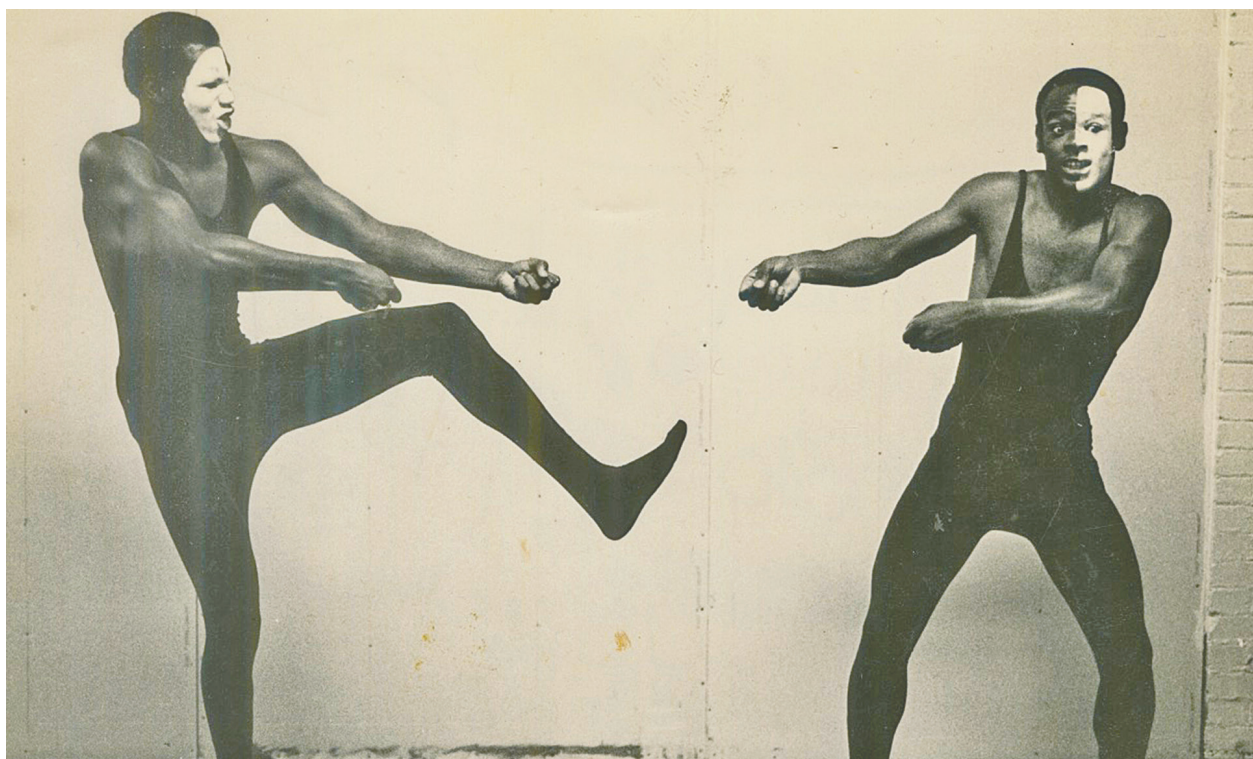
That's when Mayor Ben Walsh, in his previous role as the city's economic development director, became The Media Unit's landlord. He proposed a rental lease for \$1 a year between the troupe and the Syracuse Industrial Development Agency to ensure the unit received the award.

But he wasn't the only Walsh to back the troupe. Previously, his father Jim Walsh had provided support to upgrades inside the building. In 2014, Shepperd presented awards to both: Ben the "Mr. Outside" and Jim the "Mr. Inside."

"I still proudly display the award today," Ben said. "Walt's greatest legacy is in all the individuals that went through his program and had their lives transformed and are now better people because of it." He added, because of The Media Unit, the community is better too. "His willingness to engage in difficult dialogues, specifically around race, in a way that was both safe and impactful should be recognized."

SYRACUSE ICON

Alumni, community leaders recall their memories of The Media Unit



> Lawrence Williams, left, with Larry Drake performing a skit in the late '70s. | Photo Provided

By Ashley Kang
The Stand Director

After 43 years, Walt Shepperd is taking a step back and alumni are stepping forward

Lawrence Williams, with a big laugh, says he forced the creation of The Media Unit — by accident.

At about age 15, Williams says he and a group of friends were playing basketball off West Kennedy Street and were approached by three white men, who he remembers looked like college students.

"They asked if we were interested in being in a play and reading poetry," he recalled. "We wondered, who are these guys?"

One in particular — "a tall, lanky, white, hippy guy" — stood out. Williams later learned it was Walt Shepperd.

Shepperd asked the group of boys the question that most piqued their curiosity: "Do you want to be on TV?"

With the then Southwest Community Center program director Bill Morris (later the theater department director at Le Moyne College), Shepperd helped lead Williams and six other inner-city teens in producing two plays as well as learning technical behind-the-scenes skills. In the late '70s, Shepperd was working at then Channel 9

and made plans for the group to perform on live TV. After months of rehearsals, working on improvising, script writing and video production, the team was ready.

"When that big night came," Shepperd remembers, "Not one of them showed up."

He knew where'd they be, finding all seven back at the basketball court.

"We didn't believe it was real," Williams said. "That they'd really let us be on TV. After that night, we never doubted what Walt told us."

They were granted a second chance. The 30-minute show the boys wrote themselves was about a rag-tag group of friends. One, played by Williams, fell on hard times, succumbing to drugs. In the skit, the friends offered support and by the end, they were transformed to singing sensations belting out "Be My Girl" in tuxedos.

Then to close the show, Williams looked directly into the camera and on live TV said: "Thanks for watching, and we'll be back next week."

He says he was just mimicking what he'd seen elsewhere on TV, but could see Shepperd off stage throw his hands to his head in dismay.

"So I guess I singlehandedly forced them to produce another show the next week," said Williams, now the executive director of Syracuse Community Connections, which runs the Southwest Community Center. "The



> The Media Unit's Cast Captain Elijah Sheridan, Executive Producer Walt Shepperd and second-generation alum Tehran Hopkins take a break while preparing to close up the Montgomery Street studio. | Ashley Kang, Staff Photographer

story will live in infamy that by accident I was solely responsible for 'Rough Times Live' that later became The Media Unit."

Now after 43 years, Shepperd will step down from The Media Unit, his creation to help transform young people in Syracuse through the arts. The well-known teen production and performance troupe has tackled issues of racism, drug use and even school shootings in both a summer touring group and weekly TV show. The Media Unit's board, alumni and volunteers will carry it forward.

"This is not the end, but a new beginning," said Shepperd, who will stay on as a consultant for the group.

The unit will cease to run its summer productions, but will continue to produce the weekly TV show. Now that the studio at 327 Montgomery St. has closed, "Rough Times Live" will temporarily utilize the Onondaga Historical Association's auditorium for a few hours each Saturday to continue filming, confirmed OHA Executive Director Gregg Tripoli.

On the last few Saturdays the former studio was open, many alumni dropped in to catch up and share their memories. A video compilation is in the works and will be shared at a June retirement party for Shepperd that board members of The Media Unit are planning.

Second-generation alum and current volunteer Tehran Hopkins and Media Unit Cast Captain Elijah Sheridan are both working to sustain the program.

"It will be a united effort," said Sheridan, who views the network of alumni as an extended family. "While we'll be starting over, we will carry on Walt's mission."

Many noted Shepperd excelled at not only getting teens involved in acting, but in writing, scripting, sound, camera operation and editing, as well as instilling responsibility, time management and confidence.

At age 12, Tammy Reese was brought to the unit

by her mother.

"Donna (Reese) pretty much flung her into one of my auditions," Shepperd recalled. "She told her, 'this place is going to save your life,' then walked out."

From 1998 to 2006, Reese was active in the troupe and said it was the best training she could have received for the entertainment industry.

"Growing up on the South Side, I had joined a gang and become too much for my parents," said Reese, who is now the founder of Visionary Minds, a local publicity, entertainment and media company.

"The Media Unit definitely saved my life," she said. "I was able to be on TV, do touring shows, earn a college scholarship and become the successful business woman I am today."

"Walt had a great way of making you accountable to yourself," Williams added. It was a skill he honed over time — never doling out discipline, but developing self-discipline within young people.

"In order to have self-discipline, you need tools and skills," Williams said. "What Walt was great at was setting expectations, providing practice and letting students oppose on themselves."

Joe Driscoll, musician and common councilor for the 5th district, participated for one summer, performing in the troupe's well-known play "From the Back of the Bus."

He said The Media Unit provided one of his first opportunities to see civil rights conveyed through the arts. "Walt saw the potential that art had to spark those conversations," Driscoll said.

"Walt created this platform and vehicle for young people to gain skills they could use for the rest of their lives and he did it in a very nontraditional way," Williams concluded. "He taught kids to not sit on the sidelines, but participate and be present in this thing called life."

HISTORY CAPTURED

the
SIAND

To view
more
photos

from the last four
decades of The
Media Unit, visit
MySouthSideStand.com
to flip through a special
photo slideshow

ON THE SIDE

TUNE IN

Watch "Rough Times Live," The Media Unit's weekly TV show

WHEN: 8 p.m. each Tuesday

WHERE: Time Warner channel 98

BIKE SHARING

Last year, the city approved a two-year deal with Gotcha Bike, a national bike-sharing program. By the end of April to early May, 200 motorized bikes will circulate among 35 hubs throughout the city's core for Phase 1, says Neil Burke, the city's transportation planner.

Four main hubs will be located within the South Side for the initial roll out: Southwest Community Center, South Avenue and West Onondaga Street, Wilson Park and South Salina Street near the Centro Hub.

Bike sharing allows city dwellers to pay a daily or annual membership fee to pick up a bike at a convenient location and ride it to a desired destination, dropping it off at another hub.

Interested riders may sign up through the smartphone app, online or in person at Cooperative Federal locations.

There are three pay options: Pay as you go, a \$2 unlock fee, then 15 cents per minute; an annual membership of \$50, which includes one hour of pro-rated time per day, and an income eligible membership of \$5 to \$10 per year, also with one-hour of pro-rated time per day.

To learn more, visit ridegotcha.com/bike/

MEET THE BIKE GUY

Anthony Compasso fixes, builds and provides bikes in his community



> Anthony Compasso stands in front of his outside bike collection. | Jeff Kramer, Staff Photographer

By Jeff Kramer
The Stand Columnist

Anthony Compasso, a.k.a. “Biker Ant,” is the South Side’s go-to guy for bikes and repairs

You can fix every street light, fill every pot hole and host the best block parties this side of Mardi Gras, but can any neighborhood truly call itself complete without a big-hearted bike guy?

You know the type. Say three kids are out riding bikes while a fourth looks on forlornly. Maybe his or her bike has a busted chain or a hopelessly bent rim. Maybe it was stolen. Maybe a bicycle wasn't in the family's budget.

Who ya gonna call?

On and around West Corning Avenue, that's an easy one: Anthony Compasso, a.k.a. “Biker Ant.” For decades, Anthony, 57, a construction worker, has been the neighborhood's go-to guy to get rolling on two-wheels. He never charges for repairs. He rarely sells a bike, and when he does, it's typically to purchase repair parts he can't cannibalize from one of the dozen or so junkers in his back yard. Anyone who wants a bike has only one threshold to meet: They have to ask.

“If you ask me for a bike, it means you don't have a

bike — it's common sense,” Anthony says.

Two things about Anthony: 1) He talks about three times faster than it probably took you to read his quote, and 2) He rides fast.

“No slower than 30 mph,” he says with a straight face. “When we go bike riding, we get a group and we just go. I can't ride slow. I'm a speed rider.”

I'll discuss my cycling velocity profile another time, but for now I'd rather focus on how much Anthony and I have in common. We both love cycling, we both own more bikes than we need and we're both married to occasional riders who at least appear to have made peace with having their homes transformed into bike storage hangars. Elaine, his wife of 27 years, wins the tolerance prize, though. A hasty census turned up 37 bikes inside the Compasso house. “Those are his toys, so I just leave him to it,” Elaine says, sounding only slightly defeated.

I've heard the same tone in my home, and there's a subtext. It goes something like: My husband has a problem that is reflected in the interior design of our home. But there are worse things he could be addicted to than bikes, so can we please just pretend this is normal or better yet not even real?

What is real is that Anthony evinces an energetic decency and public-mindedness, qualities that help bring communities together.

I first met him last summer while on a bike-fixing errand for Interfaith Works of Central New York, the refugee resettlement agency on James Street. Our client numbers were down in a big way as politicians with hearts the size of hub bearings slowed the flow of legal immigrants to a trickle. But for those who managed to make it here, having a bicycle was often as essential as learning English to being able to function in a new land.

My task that day was to get the brakes fixed on a blue Crestline kid's bike. Possessing the mechanical aptitude of a yam, I turned to the undisputed Free Bike King of Syracuse, Jan Maloff, founder of the annual CNY Family Bike Giveaway. He referred me to Anthony, a volunteer mechanic in the long-running program. I dropped off the bike at Anthony's place, and a few days later he called to tell me it was fixed.

Apparently, I got off lucky. Anthony's usual MO with minor repairs is to fix it in front of kids, taking it apart and supervising as they fix it themselves.

That way they learn.

It's a carryover from his experience with a man they called Mean Joe Green. Mean Joe Green (not the football player) fixed appliances and bikes in a shack in the woods of Long Island. Anthony was just 7 years old. He wanted a bike. Mean Joe Green gave him a pile of parts and told him to build one himself. Anthony did just that, and he caught the mechanic bug.

"I don't know why they called him mean — he wasn't mean," Anthony recalls of his mentor.

There's a sense of rolling — OK, sprinting — through time and space as Anthony tells the story. Life as one grand, never-ending speed ride.

Rey Mercado, 32, a grocery store worker who moved here from New York City three years ago, also met Anthony through Jan. Anthony quickly sized him up as a ride partner, and now Rey is a frequent companion on Anthony's mad dashes around Onondaga Lake or to Green Lakes State Park. He also works with Anthony to make sure every South Side kid who knows how to ride a bike can experience the same sense of freedom and exhilaration.

"He has a good heart," Rey says of Anthony. "He's for the community."

And so the wrench is passed, from Mean Joe Green to Anthony to Rey. Like Anthony's beloved Raleigh Chopper, which he has been perfecting since 1970 — 1970! — the one with the amplified sound system and enough lighting to be visible to passing aircraft, the South Side rolls on. collection.

Kramer has written newspaper columns for many, many years in Syracuse and elsewhere. To contact him with story ideas, call (315) 420-2619 or email jeffmkramer@gmail.com

BIKE REPAIRS

To contact Anthony Compasso about a bike repair, call (315) 373-6756 or email compasso420@gmail.com

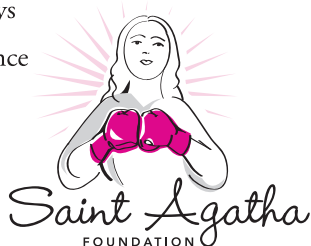
ON THE SIDE

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.

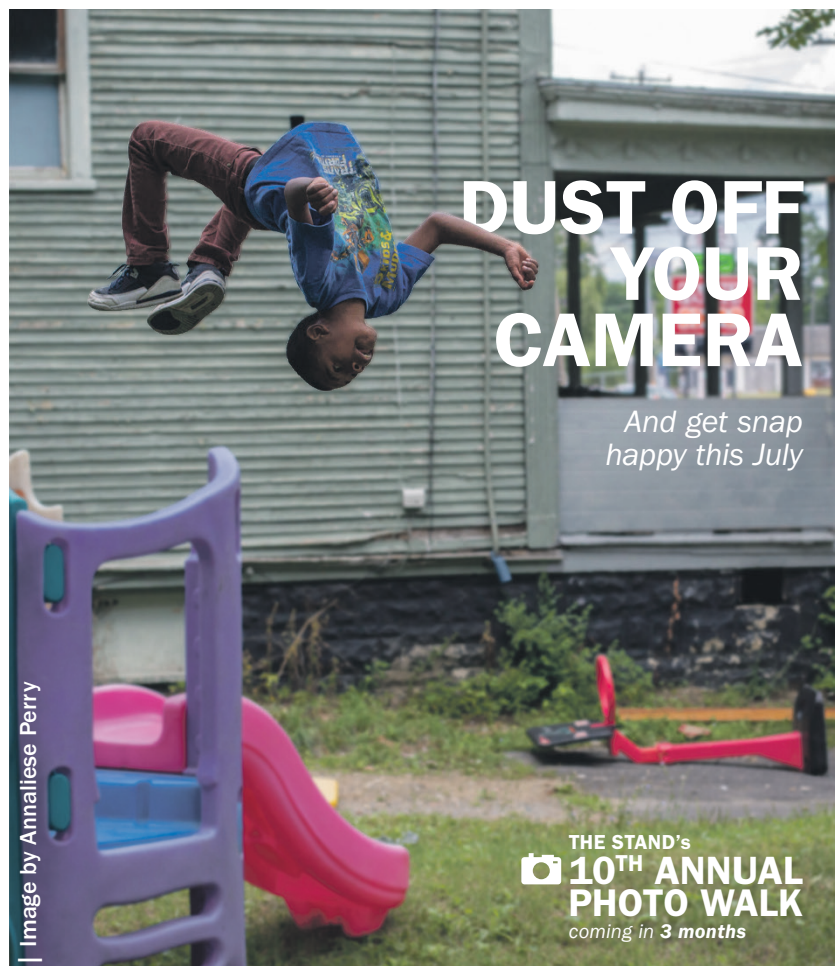
The following costs can be covered:

- ▶ 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



DUST OFF YOUR CAMERA

And get snap happy this July

Image by Annaliese Perry

THE STAND's
10TH ANNUAL
PHOTO WALK
coming in 3 months

IMPACT STATEMENT

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), which is likely to put forward a preferred option for replacing the I-81 viaduct, was set to be released by the Federal Highway Administration in early 2019.

The state delayed the process to wait for the results of a \$2 million study of the tunnel option commissioned by the Department of Transportation (DOT).

A report is due any day now. Once revealed, there will be a window to collect public feedback.

This public comment period must be at minimum 45 days but could run as long as four to six months, Barry Lentz, with Moving People Transportation Coalition, told attendees to a public meeting held in March.

Once the draft, which some said could be as long as 800 pages, is released and the public comment period begins, everything people say will be recorded and the DOT will be required to respond to each comment.

UNCERTAIN FUTURE

Why the New York Civil Liberties Union is addressing I-81 construction



> Volunteer Charles Pierce-El, Lanessa Chaplin and fellow canvassers make their way from the Dunbar Center to local homeowners' houses to provide information about the future of I-81. | Nabiha Asim, Staff Photographer

By Ashley Kang
The Stand Director

Group is concerned with civil liberties of those to be most affected — South Side residents

A new voice has entered the fray in the contentious debate over the future of I-81, this time on behalf of residents who live near the viaduct and who will likely be at risk regardless of which option for the interstate's replacement prevails.

Among the questions The New York Civil Liberties Union has started asking: How will children be kept safe and healthy while spending their childhoods in the epicenter of a massive construction zone?

"Imagine, there will be school children who will spend their entire elementary education in a construction zone," said Lanessa L. Chaplin, project 81 counsel for the NYCLU, to a crowd at one recent meeting. She stresses this will impact all students at Dr. King Elementary School, located at 416 E. Raynor Ave., a school with a student population of around 80 percent African-American and nearly 90 percent living below

the poverty line.

She next asked, "How will those kids walk to school safely?"

Portions of I-81 are deteriorating and nearing the end of their lifespan, and the 1.4-mile elevated section, or viaduct, stretching over Pioneer Homes must be updated to meet current safety standards.

Three options are currently being considered: a tunnel, the community grid or rebuilding a wider viaduct.

While several I-81 groups await the release of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), the NYCLU's involvement is focused on protecting the residents living in the shadow of the viaduct.

The group is working to determine how these families will maintain their civil liberties throughout the entire process. A key concern is how children and their families, many who've spent generations here, will be kept safe and healthy throughout the process or return years later after construction is complete.

"We're dealing with communities of color who are in the most concentrated areas of poverty who cannot get up and leave, who already have respiratory issues because they live next to a highway in the first

place,” Chaplin said.

Populations living within 150 meters of a major U.S. highway included predominantly members of racial and ethnic minority communities, foreign-born persons and persons who speak a language other than English at home, according to a 2013 Centers for Disease Control report, “Residential Proximity to Major Highways.”

The report reviewed numerous epidemiologic studies to find health disparities in such urban neighborhoods including greater rates of asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and other respiratory symptoms; cardiovascular disease; adverse reproductive outcomes, and increased mortality. A link was found as well when looking at children and the onset of childhood asthma, non-asthma respiratory symptoms and impaired lung function.

California public health law, widely considered more progressive than other states, restricts new school building construction near major highways and busy traffic corridors to ensure air quality at proposed sites.

For several months, Chaplin, a native South Sider, has been at the forefront of informing the community about their rights as construction looms for whichever option is chosen. NYCLU holds no stance on a preferred option.

“My role is to look out for the highway’s closest neighbors,” she said.

Chaplin regularly holds informational meetings to answer residents’ questions each Tuesday at Beauchamp Branch Library and spends multiple Saturdays each month knocking on doors with volunteers to get South Siders involved in the conversation.

One Saturday while canvassing, she encountered a homeowner worried about whether she’ll lose her home of 40 years. Chaplin said this resident is just one of many she’s spoken to with such worries.

The remainder of Chaplin’s time is spent at the office answering calls and emails, researching, writing blog posts and making flyers and infographics to hand out to residents so they can stay informed. All her efforts are in the hope of preventing a repeat from 50 years ago, when the highway’s construction decimated the 15th Ward.

The existence of the I-81 viaduct has been a major driver in the issues of hyper segregation in housing and schools, says NYCLU’s Central New York Chapter Director Yusuf Abdul-Qadir.

At a March 8 meeting organized by GreeningUSA, a group advocating for sustainable communities, Abdul-Qadir was one of five voices speaking on the need to delve deeper into the I-81 discussion than how the final decision will impact commuters.

“We’ve allowed the conversation to be reduced to what an inconvenience (one option over the other may be) on people’s commute time,” he said. “None of those



> Lanessa Chaplin and Yusuf Abdul-Qadir speak to the community on the health implications of the I-81 Project during the Soul to Soul I-81 Impact event held Feb. 27 at the Tech Garden. | Nabihah Asim, Staff Photographer

people seeking five minutes of convenience live next to the highway.”

Barry Lentz, with Moving People Transportation Coalition, said that while this project has regional impact, consideration needs to be given to what the proportional impact will be on distant residents compared to those living below and beside the highway.

“The needs and impact of construction on those commuting in on the highway, say from Oswego or Auburn,” he said, “must be weighed in proportion to the needs and impact on those living in the vicinity of the highway.”

Also gathered that day were: Bob Haley, of the American Institute of Architects; Joe Driscoll, chair of the Syracuse Common Council Transportation Committee, and Chaplin.

“This is not a transportation issue, but a community planning issue,” added Haley, joking that one thing Syracuse does not have an issue with is traffic. “Travel time is not a problem here. We’re probably the best in the nation on this.”

In response, Abdul-Qadir said that what Syracuse has become known for is its label as top in the nation for concentrated poverty.

“We should be embarrassed,” he stated. “We should use this shame to push our city to make the most of this opportunity to resolve our past mistake.”

— Nabihah Asim, Intern for *The Stand* contributed

CHAPLIN’S DREAM JOB

For Lanessa Chaplin, this is her dream job, and one tailor-made for her talents.

In drafting the job description, the NYCLU’s Central New York Chapter Director Yusuf Abdul-Qadir had Chaplin in mind.

He launched the group’s I-81 project around six months ago to elevate the voices of those who will be adversely impacted by the final decision and years of construction to follow. He set out to hire a lawyer who could advocate for residents and mitigate potential damages that may occur in neighborhoods located along the viaduct.

“This role was just for me,” Chaplin said. “I thought it was the perfect opportunity to mix community work and legal work in one job.”

At times community outreach can be frustrating, but Chaplin insists she’ll keep fighting, which is not solely her prediction. When she visited a psychic a few years ago, she was told she’d die in her early 90s — fighting.

She believes, fighting for justice.

EMERGENCY SERVICES

Heart Attack or Stroke? Say, “Take Me to Crouse.”



Quickest Cardiac Care

- Door-to-cardiac treatment times among the lowest in the region
- Only area hospital designated by American Heart Association as a *Mission: Lifeline Gold* provider
- Close teamwork with local and regional EMS partners

Comprehensive Stroke Center

- One of just 12 in New York State
- Aggressive door-to-treatment times exceed national average
- Earned *Gold Plus–Elite Honor Roll* status from American Heart/Stroke Association

Advanced Facility, Advanced Care

- Highly efficient triage for all medical situations
- High-quality care delivered promptly and with Carepassion®
- Modern design allows us to move patients faster – and more comfortably

All this adds up to **superior emergency care** from the hospital you trust – Crouse Health.

The Chief Speaks

> Syracuse police Chief Kenton Buckner addresses Medical Academy of Science and Health (MASH) Camp students Feb. 22 at Upstate Hospital's Community Campus as part of the university's Black History Month celebration. He shared his vision for modern-day policing. | Kai Nguyen, Staff Photographer

By Steve Davis
The Stand Founder

Exclusive one-on-one interview with the new chief reveals his initial plans for the department's next three to five years

Police Chief Kenton Buckner offers short answers to personal questions, volunteering basics. When it's suggested people might want to know something more about the man, not just the chief, he stiffens slightly. "Something about my mother?" he asked Feb. 27 early into a 100-minute Q&A exchange with The Stand's founder.

Buckner, who began work the first week of December last year, explains that he prefers to be a "desert island" when it comes to his private time. "I've found that it's best." But Buckner calls himself an "outgoing introvert," a workaholic who will spend little time sheltered in his downtown apartment over the next three to five years. That's how long he guesses he might be here. He spent 4½ years as chief in Little Rock, Arkansas.

Buckner's predecessor, Frank Fowler, previously told The Stand a story of a brush with the cops as a boy growing up in Missouri, and how he thought he might even get shot by them when he and some friends had a tense exchange with officers on a St. Louis playground. Buckner was the son of an officer — though Buckner says he did



KENTON BUCKNER has 25 years of law enforcement experience and grew up in a small town in Kentucky. Prior to his Syracuse appointment, he served as chief in Little Rock.

not know his dad well — and the new Syracuse chief says he always wanted to be an officer. His experiences with police were positive. But he says he understands others — particularly some African-Americans — have reasons to mistrust.

How will he approach the coming years? On questions of policing, policy and community, Buckner answers comfortably and in detail. It was The Stand and not the chief who eventually called an end to the interview. Here are some highlights culled from an 11,000-word transcript. You can read these answers in more detail, and the entire exchange, online at mysouthsidestand.com.

INTERVIEW HIGHLIGHTS

- The city's police are being reorganized from 22 territories into three, with a captain in charge of each, to be more accessible to the public. Details will be rolled out soon.
- Buckner is working with the Citizen Review Board on what he hopes will be a better relationship and will have recommendations to share soon. But he notes that he, the union and officers have legitimate worries to address.
- The police use-of-force policy is being revised and also will be completed soon.
- Buckner plans no substantive changes in the operations of the city's Crime Reduction Teams.
- Buckner hopes new initiatives with groups such as the NAACP will help with minority recruitment.
- City cops will be back patrolling at the swimming pools this summer.
- Buckner expects his tenure would have a typical run of three to five years.
- This former chief in Little Rock believes his narcotics officers there have appropriately used "no knock" warrants in drug raids, a practice that has come under challenge.

You mentioned you'd be here perhaps 3 to 5 years, and that's what the data shows. That's not long. Is that something you think you'll hear about from lifelong community members?

I hear a thousand things from the community. I think that people want you to come to work and give them an honest day's work for an honest day's pay. I think they'd like to feel like you're committed to both the job and the community and that you are open and honest about the business that you are doing. I believe that most people understand that chiefs don't last forever, that this is a tough business, that there's a reason chiefs last three to five years in most cities.

You have mentioned curbing violence in the community as a priority?

Violent crime is something that we have to attempt to manage. It's part of the fear of crime, it's part of perceptions of your city, it's a part of the trauma when you actually have violent crime in communities. It's a part of historical scars in cities that are crime-infested, that have those historical issues of homicides, aggravated assault, where people don't feel safe in their community despite what your crime data tells you — that you had a decrease in crime one year or so. But if you go into communities where they hear shots fired every night, they don't want to hear about your numbers because they're still lying on the floor in their houses and apartments.

About 10 percent of Syracuse officers are African-American. Do you have particular strategies to increase that number?

I've taken a direct seat at the table for the application and hiring process so that if there's someone who does not make it in our process — meaning the background investigations or anything where decisions are made on the administrative side of the process — I'm intimately involved with that to make sure we're doing the things that I feel give us an opportunity to be competitive with all races. We want quality people first but we certainly want to be reflective of our community. We believe that's equally important.

Recruiting is not a police issue, it's a community issue. One of the examples of that is where we plan to partner with the NAACP going forward to help with the written exam, and get other organizations involved. Myself, police, fire and civil service to work on things that we can do to offer study sessions for individuals or preparatory work for the written exams, open to the entire public but certainly with a keen focus on trying to get minority candidates through that initial threshold. It's well-documented that minorities — not just minorities, many individuals — struggle with written exams, so we think that will help.



> Gloria Lopez, Upstate Medical University's associate vice president and chief diversity officer, presents Buckner with a certificate of appreciation for his dedication to reduce crime and build coalitions. | Kai Nguyen, Staff Photographer

And I'm also reviewing adding an assessment center to the promotional process (for existing officers) so that a written exam is not the total score but part of a composite score that allows an individual to demonstrate that they can apply many of the things that someone can read in a book, for people who won't do as well with a written exam but will perform better in an assessment center where you actually apply the concepts you've been asked about.

Do you think about race and how it seems, inevitably, to be a part of everything?

Yeah, I know, but it's monumental. If you're a part of that minority group that is standing on the outside looking in, then it's the elephant for you. If you're part of the majority that's in the room and you get to determine who walks into that room, then it's peanuts to you. But I have to approach it as if it's the elephant in the room because clearly our community is frustrated with it, our mayor has made it part of his charge to diversify all of city government, and certainly no department is probably more visible than the police department and he probably hears about the lack of diversity in the police department more than any other department in city government.

I do know the "trust thing" is huge. Just getting people to apply to be a cop.

Well, law enforcement is a difficult sale in black and brown communities. There are significant present and

past scars in those communities, and many believe that those scars were inflicted by public safety, law enforcement, government. In some examples, it's perception and in some they have tangible examples to prove their lack of trust. I inherit those relationships, that lack of trust, whether I was on the watch when these things happened, I inherit that when I walk in the door. Again, that's an elephant in the room that I have to address because that mistrust exists today. So when I'm trying to recruit that 21-year-old kid to come and join us on the police department, he or she may have some issues in their rear-view mirror to where they've seen the police do some things that are disturbing to them. I have to overcome that to inspire them to be a part of what policing can be or what it should be. And to be a part of the solution for Syracuse. That's no easy feat.

What does this concept of "community policing" mean to you?

I think that people have become very familiar with community policing as a buzzword or catchphrase. To me, community policing is when you're able to provide tangible examples of prevention, partnerships and problem-solving. That's community policing in a nutshell. You'll find a hundred different definitions of it if you look it up, but if you don't have partnerships with the community, and you're

not preventing crime and solving problems, I really don't think you're doing community policing ... And (you need) tangible examples of it because, you know, I've been to several meetings where I'll tell individuals that if we came here to say that we've met, we've wasted everyone's time. What are we going to have as a result of this meeting? I think that communities that have not understood the meaning or the importance of collective impact ... continue to be frustrated by some things that are going on. The example that I would use is that if you go into communities that have a private high school or they have a church or something that's very, very dear to their heart, you will not see a liquor store next to that.

Some communities won't allow it to happen. And there are some communities that will be frustrated by it but they allow it to happen every day. That's the difference between action and meeting.

One thing in relation to the community concept is small satellite police offices in neighborhoods.

We have different locations throughout the city where our officers will go, the various community centers that we have, the one in Westcott, the Southwest Community Center; officers are in and out of there, we're in the schools. An organization that I had a great relationship with in Little Rock that I want to improve our footprint with here is the Boys & Girls Clubs. We'll see some of

those things in the summer months. We will be back at the city pools this year. We had kind of pulled away from that last year, and there were some issues as a result of it. So anywhere we have an opportunity to constructively come in contact with youth you will see a robust effort on our part.

Any other concrete plans that folks might look for in the future months that also relate to this kind of community policing?

Well, the police officers in the community policing unit now are centralized. We're decentralizing that

area of the agency and other areas of the police department. We'll be rolling that out over the next month or so to kind of give the community an idea of how the agency will look decentralized.

What does that mean?

Now, all of us report out of one location off of Erie Boulevard and our captains, who in my opinion are the first level of executive leadership, are on a shift (around the clock). We are going to move the captains to day hours, the kind of hours I work, and now they will be responsible for three different sections of the city that we've divided the city into, and they are responsible for

THE CHIEF'S "CREDO"

"I have to have something that I lean on that will give me stamina in these arenas where I'm pulled in so many different directions — and that has always been to focus on doing the right thing. ... If I can look in the mirror and feel like I did the right thing based upon what I believe in my mind and my heart, and the value system that I have, I'm OK with that. I gave up being popular a long time ago. I've found when I focus on that (personal philosophy), that I've been able to survive in this profession."

OFFICER DUTY

Chief on holding cops accountable

"People who understand how to engage people like me, they're not going to let you give them lip service. They're going to say, 'When can I follow back up with you? And what number should I call to let you know if I continue to see something?' We have to train certain sections of our community to do that because they don't even realize the power that they have. You're the citizen. We serve you. My salary comes from your taxes."

DRUG TACTICS

Chief defends Little Rock police and 'no knock' warrants

In a lengthy story in The Washington Post Opinions section posted on Oct. 14, 2018, blogger and reporter Radley Balko details how the police Narcotics Unit often employs "no knock" warrants in drug investigations, and how one target is suing over it. Buckner said he was confident the police would be vindicated, and spoke in some detail about such work, though not the Balko story specifically. Buckner said a thorough exploration of the unit's work would show a "balanced" approach to its policing. "Every night you see something on TV where someone is shot or stabbed," he said, "or something has happened to them, yet people expect us to walk up (knock loudly on the door) and say, 'Shooter, are you in there?'" That's not how the world works."

those geographical areas 24 hours a day. In addition to that they'll have the community police officers that were once centralized under our administrative bureau now assigned to the patrol commanders who will then deploy them for some of these community policing initiatives — many they were already doing but will now do in a more organized way in these three central areas that we will have, which will be the north, southwest and southeast of our city.

In the new way, they will not be on a day shift, mid-shift, late watch, which to me took power and authority away from them. They will be working the primary business hours that I work, kind of the day hours into the evening. Business time during the day, community connection during the evening. And they will be in a specified area; now we're broken up into 22 territories, but we're just one city is how we're deployed. Tomorrow, which is our new way, we will be this (in three areas): Captain, captain, captain. ... Right now we don't have this level of contact with the public. Every citizen should know who their captain is that's responsible for their neighborhood.

We will roll it out in community meetings (by the end of March).

And anything about opening these smaller kinds of "satellites," offices around the city?

That's kind of a midterm move that we would like to see. Maybe police in a substation or something actually in the areas rather than centralized like we have on Erie Boulevard. But we have to remember, too, that we are only 25-square miles so we have to look at the financial feasibility of that and what is our gain for that in exchange for the cost that we would incur.

What about the Crime Reduction Teams? Is that something you're going to continue, constituted as they are now?

We'll continue to have that mission. It's important that you have a unit that is able to go into areas based upon intelligence-led policing, to address the right locations and focus on the right individuals in those areas. I have to make sure that we're doing that in a way that we're not unintentionally harming the community, because I'm also well aware they (CRTs) have been the source of some complaints, and some of the mistrust in the community. So I have to make sure we're doing business the right way. That's a part of my job, to make sure we're training folks the right way, that we're hiring the right people, and that we are providing public safety efforts in a way that is seen as respectable by the citizens that we're trying to serve.

The mission won't change. I'm a person who believes

from time to time you need to switch individuals out so I may have some leadership changes at some point with that, but that's not a reflection of a person not doing anything. I believe there is value in moving people around, so that will be maybe some change we see sometime in the future. But for now we certainly will continue to press forward with that unit.

There was a group of activists meeting to discuss use of force by officers in the SPD. The group's mission was to see the policy amended to not only cover when it was OK to use force, but to also feature detailed guidelines on how force could be avoided to begin with. What do you think of this idea?

I don't know of a professional police organization that doesn't train on when you can and cannot use force. That makes no sense. Part of that to me, listening to you at a distance, it sounds like part ignorance on the part of the public on what the police actually train on. Which to me says there's an opportunity for improvement in illuminating (for the public) the curriculum that we have for the training academy on the sensitive topics that are key to the community and what we have in place to try to protect the public from officers kind of developing their own agenda or doing something that would be illegal. We're in the process of revamping our use-of-force policy, and I anticipate the new policy will be ready here over the next 30 days.

We will roll it out where the public can see it for themselves.

I have never seen the policy itself. Does it currently include guidelines about steps to avoid the use of force?

The escalation, and taking other things into account, is a part of any use-of-force policy. Here's the problem: There is no policy for the public. If I'm having an issue with this young lady who's leaving Marshall Street and she's intoxicated and she's decided to do whatever she is doing, I'm responding to this level of resistance. So I can have all of these things that say, "You shall not hit a person in the head" — there was something written in the paper that someone recommended that we have a policy that says you shouldn't be able to hit someone in the head. Well, that sounds good in a climate-controlled room. "Hey, that's reasonable." But if you're in the business of wrassling with lions, it's very difficult to tell someone, "Well, don't hit the lion in the head when he's on top of you." You're trying to get this lion off of you. So there's always suggestions about what we should be doing and how we should do it. We should always be legal, we should always be compassionate, we should always use force as a last option, we should always try to de-escalate the individual that we're encountering. But sometimes

that doesn't work. And sometimes this job is ugly. That doesn't mean that it wasn't legal and it wasn't necessary.

Have you met any folks from the Citizen Review Board and thought about your relationship with them?

Yes, I've met (administrator) Ranette (Releford) and I think the gentleman who is kind of a co-chair or a chair of the program. I know Ranette is seen as the administrator of it. Clifford (Ryans) of course is a member. I think I've met one or two other members that I can't recall their name. I can tell you that in my preliminary summary of the police and CRB issue, I think that by design, unintentionally, it's not working. I think that there are some opportunities for improvement in the language that kind of tells each side what they are supposed to do. I think that needs to be revamped.

We're in the process of getting ready to meet on both sides of the aisle to give the Common Council something to review to consider changes. One of the things that I take issue with is that we as a police department are not being as transparent as we possibly should, and some of that may be our mistrust of that system. On the other side of that, I don't like the fact that there is a totally independent other investigation (by CRB), because you're subjecting the officers to almost a double jeopardy kind of situation to where now they're having

To read
the full
Q&A
transcript
with the chief,



Visit The Stand online at
MySouthSideStand.com

to come in and give statements about something else.

Do you see officers ever appearing before the CRB?

That's huge. I think a lot of that will depend upon guidance and leadership provided by the union. Because we can go in a room and discuss all day what we believe is a fair process and if the union doesn't believe that it's fair or that they'd rather not participate, we're in a union state.

RELIGIOUS BELIEF

Chief on his relationship with God

"It's important to me. I grew up a Baptist. I still practice a Baptist faith. I am not a person that is in church every Sunday but I certainly subscribe to a higher being and certainly feel like I've had the good fortune of blessings and mercy because of that relationship."

ON THE SIDE

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Rooted in activism



> Aggie Lane works in the community garden she started with her neighbor at 341 Midland Ave., planting onions, garlic and more. | Emani Glee, Staff Photographer

By Emani Glee
The Stand Reporter

Aggie Lane has worked to fight racism for decades with the Urban Jobs Task Force

The sun managed to break through the trees towering over Aggie Lane as she hunched over in the dirt trying to unearth a ripe, red onion.

The sound of squirrels rustling and bees buzzing filled the air, along with the occasional passing car. Lane's tan sweater popped against the darkness of the soil. The right leg of her jeans had a dirt stain where she had knelt time and again planting over 100 garlic cloves. Her shoes that used to be white were covered in a layer of dirt; her left shoe held together with a wide piece of black tape

wrapped around the front.

Here, at the community garden Lane started with her next-door neighbor in 1992 at 341 Midland Ave., is where Lane first began growing roots for her future activism.

Walking into Lane's home where she lives with two housemates, there's a mix of furniture and patterns, along with floor-to-ceiling shelves overflowing with used books. Every wall has a piece of art, each with its own story. Among the art was a photo of El Salvador and a colorful quilt based on the Lakota tribe.

Lane's favorite is a picture of an African woman with a child. The strong sense of culture on her walls embodies the life that she purposely lived, with her drive to end racism at the center of the causes the 73-year-old

has taken up.

Lane, a retired industrial engineer turned community activist, is a white woman who lived in affluent communities for more than half of her life. She has spent many of her “golden” years dedicated to making her voice heard as she fought for the South Side community she planted herself in 26 years ago.

Her experience immersing herself in other countries has led her to put pressure on local government for fair treatment and job opportunities for low income and minority residents.

The South Side community is a section of the city with high rates of concentrated poverty and unemployment. About 33 percent of Syracuse residents live in poverty, but the rate of poverty in the 13202-zip code Lane lives in is nearly 58 percent, according to the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2016 American Community Survey.

In the same zip code, 31 percent of blacks and 33 percent of Hispanics were unemployed, compared to about an 11 percent unemployment rate in all of Syracuse, the community survey found.

Lane diligently works to combat poverty on the South Side through the Urban Jobs Task Force (UJTF) she created to promote local employment on upcoming developments such as the I-81 project, especially for minorities. She was awarded the Building Equity Service Award by UJTF in March to honor her decades of commitment to pushing for racial equality.

Lane was born in Washington, D.C., but she describes her childhood as growing up in an enclave on Long Island where everyone was white except for the servants. She credits four young black girls for helping her realize she was living in a “white bubble.” Lane said she maintained the savior mentality she learned from her mother until a trip to Nigeria to teach math raised her consciousness.

“I realized I don’t need to be saving anyone,” Lane said. “There’s plenty of Nigerians that could be teaching this.”

The harsh realities of the racism and colonialism she saw hit her so hard, she found herself in a state of depression. Her newfound enlightenment would later go dormant as she fell into the routine of traditional life — marriage and kids.

Lane said she took a close look at her life when she was raising her three children in Fayetteville. She felt she was a part of the segregation problem in the country and decided to make a change.

This is when, she says, she began her journey of

getting out of her bubble.

She packed up and moved to the South Side in 1992. Lane said she knew everyone might not be welcoming, but by getting active in the community and

“I began my journey of getting out of my bubble.”

— Aggie Lane

intentionally seeking out diverse relationships, she felt less like an invader.

She quickly made friends with her next-door neighbor, Lula Donald. It’s not that people were upset Lane moved in, but they didn’t understand what she was trying to do, Donald said.

Once Lane moved into the neighborhood, a new wave began to rise of fighting back and taking a stance for the community. Neighborhood residents put up a notable fight against the building of a sewage plant on



> In her home, Aggie Lane sits with her dog below her favorite piece of art in her living room. | Emani Glee, Staff Photographer

ON THE SIDE

URBAN JOBS TASK FORCE

MISSION

The Urban Jobs Task Force is an alliance of organizations and residents of Syracuse and Onondaga County. Its main objective is to advocate for economic justice by pushing for an inclusive economy that supports local employment to combat poverty.

ON THE HORIZON

UJTF recently released a year-long study on Syracuse’s construction trades lack of racial diversity. The group is currently circulating an I-81 petition on its website to demand this project recruit and retain minority, female and local workers.

The petition can be found online at: [Facebook.com/SyracuseUrbanJobs](https://www.facebook.com/SyracuseUrbanJobs)

LEARN MORE

Go online at: ujtf.org or [Facebook.com/SyracuseUrbanJobs](https://www.facebook.com/SyracuseUrbanJobs)

ON THE SIDE

URBAN JOBS TASK FORCE

SUCCESS THUS FAR

Since starting in 2012, UJTF has achieved several significant victories:

- In partnership with the Joint School Construction Board (JSCB), it created a Syracuse residency rule that states 20 percent of the workers on the \$300 million school renovation project must be city residents.
- UJTF drafted and fought for the city of Syracuse's Resident Employment Ordinance, which became law in 2016. It ensures a city funded project over \$100,000 must hire 20 percent of workers from the city.
- In order to verify job growth, group pushed for the JSCB, city of Syracuse and county to use electronic tracking programs to monitor who gets jobs and contracts.



> Aggie Lane accepts the Building Equity Service Award March 14 from Urban Jobs Task Force President Deka Dancil. The award was presented for her decades of work fighting for social justice. | Ashley Kang, Staff Photographer

the South Side, but it was built anyway.

Ryan McMahon, now the Onondaga County executive, was a part of the conversations while serving in other offices. McMahon didn't single Lane out, but he said he disagrees with the loud approach of activist groups like the ones Lane was part of. But he admires her nonetheless.

"We don't always agree on everything," McMahon said. "But she's someone I've grown to respect."

Ed Kinane, Lane's long-time housemate, said Lane has struggled handling her internalized racism, and methodically tries to deal with it. Lane said she has long been aware of, and owned, her personal racism and bias, but she doesn't consider herself an activist who is quick to jump on the bandwagon.

She said her engineering background shaped her into a solution-driven and research-first activist.

"I think things are really complex, so I tend to be slow in screaming and shouting until I've done the research to understand the issue," Lane said.

In a way, moving to the South Side was, and has been, a form of research for Lane.

As a white woman, she was concerned with racism, but hadn't experienced it herself. It's one thing to read about or talk about it, Lane said. But when it is your neighbors that suffer as a result of racism, you get a different perspective, she said.

"I realized that it's a lifetime fight," Lane said. "It'll be going on after I die, but it's a fight worth fighting for."

READ REPORT ON INEQUITY IN THE CONSTRUCTION TRADES IN SYRACUSE

The Urban Jobs Task Force and Legal Services of Central New York unveiled a year-long study on construction practices in Syracuse last month.

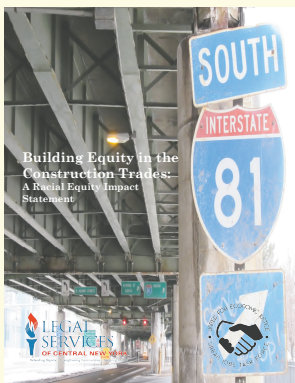
A key issue in the 152-page report, "Building Equity in the Construction Trades: A Racial Equity Impact Statement," addresses hiring policies on the future I-81 project.

The goal of the study is to show how employment policies and practices affect communities of color

and the impact such policies can have on future generations. The report also makes recommendations for equitable policies and practices that will strengthen Syracuse's economy.

UJTF says it plans to further address the report's findings and recommendations in upcoming forums and currently is circulating a petition in support of local jobs on the I-81 project.

To read the full report, visit ujtf.org.



Tyrone Dixon

Nominated by Rachielle Scrivens

By Matthew Gutierrez
Staff Reporter

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

A: My princess was born two days after my birthday, so it was the best birthday gift I could ever imagine. I remember it as if it was yesterday. She was born at 3:36 p.m. When I heard her cry, it was as if there were new life breathing into me. It literally took my breath. I was hit with a ton of emotions. I felt I was responsible for another life now, someone to mold her life.

Q: What was your relationship like with your father?

A: We have a really good relationship. He's always been a hands-off mentor. He allowed me to fall forward and make my own mistakes, but he was supportive. We had dinner yesterday, and I told him I appreciate that. He wasn't a micro-managing parent. There was no built up resentment. I love my dad for that.

Q: Why are fathers important?

A: They are central. It would be phenomenal if you have two parents on the same page, but I absolutely think being a father is imperative. There's only so much a mother or father alone can deliver. You have to be there to be able to guide our youth.

Q: And the relationship can grow over time, right?

A: I liken it to a bank account. If we instill enough positivity and give them that emotional space when they're younger, that gives us more in the relationship bank account. In the future, they'll draw upon that. Kids will create a savings account. As kids get older, they'll draw from it.

Q: How can fathers break through the "men don't cry" narrative?

A: I want to be an open door and completely vulnerable to my daughter when it comes to crying. You cannot say, 'Don't cry' and expect someone to go all life being tough, not crying. When you attack it that way, it creates an imbalance. It's OK to cry. That type of mentality — that men are extremely tough — has been a detriment to us as men.

Q: What advice do you plan to give your Abigail?

A: I have a whole book full. The most important thing I'm going to let her know is that life is trial and error. There's no clear-cut



MEET TYRONE: Dixon, born and raised in Syracuse, has one daughter, Abigail, who turns 1 on April 11. He is married to Ivonna Dixon. | Provided Photo

way. Daddy can tell you do this, this and this. It may not work out. Understand life is based on trial and error. You can chart your own path, do what you want to do. You don't have to be what everyone else wants you to be.

Q: What have you learned about work-life balance as a father?

A: Everything flows through my wife and my daughter. If their peace of mind is there, everything else flows from there. My energy is always going to be high. You have to take the approach of being supportive, 100 percent in your woman and child.

Q: Final thoughts?

A: Something I was not expecting as a result would be the depth of love that it brought me, and the depth of appreciation it brought to my life. It was like, 'Oh wow, this is what life is about. This is the beauty of life.' You think about the people who have done so much to allow you to get to this point in life and understand life. It wasn't about me. It was, 'Wow, this is amazing, this is literally a miracle on earth.' If I'm having a down day, I look back to that. You have a beautiful girl, beautiful wife at home. It's OK. Everything will be OK.

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