

the Stand

south side news

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Syracuse, NY
NOVEMBER 2019 Issue 78 FREE

ENDING VIOLENCE

iApologize holds a memorial cookout to honor three killed in shootings

MONEY ON THE MIND

Financial Empowerment Center offers free counseling

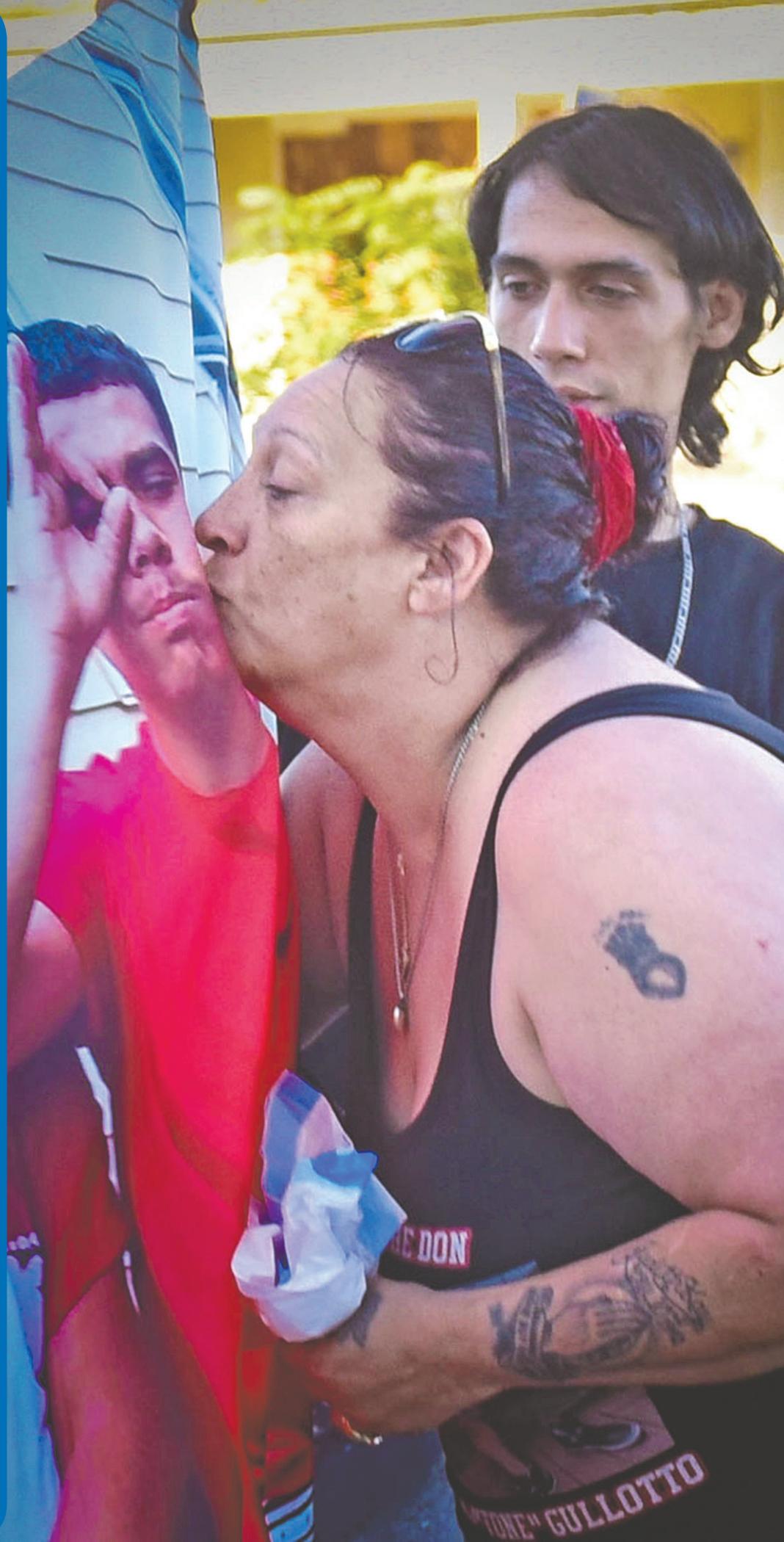
history told

How David Haas made his mark as a local storyteller

Father Hasan Stephens admires his children's gifts

All in the Family

INJUSTICE CORRECTED



the Stand

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CONTACT US

SOUTH SIDE NEWSPAPER PROJECT
(315) 882-1054
ASHLEY@MYSOUTHSIDESTAND.COM

THE STAND IS BASED OUT OF THE SOUTH SIDE COMMUNICATION CENTER
2331 SOUTH SALINA STREET
SYRACUSE, NY 13205

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■ Cover photography by Sheila Quinell of family members of gunshot victim Antonio Gullotto

CALENDAR | NOVEMBER

What: Denim, Diamonds and Pearls Party & Scholarship Fundraiser
When: 7 to 11 p.m. Friday, Nov. 8
Where: Sky Armory, 351 S. Clinton St.
More Details: Join members of Iota Nu Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority for a party with a purpose. The annual Denim, Diamonds and Pearls event benefits the sorority's scholarship fund and community programs. Plan to come dressed in denim and bling.
Cost: Tickets are \$45 per person and \$80 per couple
To Purchase: Visit eventbrite.com and search for "Denim, Diamonds and Pearls"

What: Team Angel and We Rise Above the Streets Thanksgiving Dinner
When: Noon Saturday, Nov. 23
Where: St. Lucy's Church, 432 Gifford St.
More Details: Team Angel and We Rise Above The Streets Recovery Outreach will co-host their second annual Thanksgiving dinner for the homeless and marginalized citizens of Syracuse. To help guarantee a successful event, volunteers and donated items are needed, including: cooked turkey only, vegetables, potato salad, macaroni and cheese and desserts.
Cost: Free and open to all in need
More Info: Call (315) 491-7164 to schedule a drop off time or learn how to volunteer



For a full listing of upcoming events, visit MySouthSideStand.com/events/

Most stories about Interstate 81 in publications other than The Stand do not include the voices of South Side residents. That's one of the things we learned from our reader survey. Less than 20 percent of those surveyed remember seeing a South Sider in the last article they read about I-81.

This lack of coverage on how South Side residents feel about the future of I-81 is problematic because much of the South Side will be disproportionately affected by the construction to either replace — or more likely remove — the elevated 1.4-mile stretch of the interstate that runs through the city.

Understandably, readers have a lot of questions. These include concerns about homes being destroyed; the length of the construction project; the impact on traffic and public transit; the effect on economic development along Salina Street; the creation of jobs for minorities; worries about dust and other health effects; and the fear of gentrification.

The Stand wants to provide information addressing these concerns and to share perspectives from residents, experts and local advocacy groups. Our goal is to give residents the information they need to develop their own informed opinions and so that they can ask pointed questions when the state Department of Transportation opens its final comment period on the project.

The DOT has said it will release a draft environmental impact statement by spring 2020. The public can then comment on the impact statement for 45 days. The construction of 81 caused irreparable harm to the city, particularly to the predominantly Black, South Side neighborhood known as the 15th Ward.

But that doesn't mean tearing down the highway and replacing it with a surface level grid — which is the state's current preferred option — is universally accepted by South Side residents. And it is clear that whatever plan is enacted will affect the daily lives of residents for years to come.

The board of The Stand wants to include as many South Side voices as possible to spark community participation in the decision making process. As such, we want to hear from you, and will be dedicating a large part of our Winter issue to sharing as many South Side perspectives as possible. We will accept letters to the editor of up to 350 words on I-81. All submissions will be reviewed by our editors and compiled into a collection of perspectives by and for South Side residents. And in addition to your letters, we'd love to hear your story ideas as they relate to I-81, both currently and with a historical perspective. We look forward to hearing from you.

Email letters and story ideas to Ashley@mysouthsidestand.com or mail to Attn. The Stand, South Side Communication Center, 2331 S. Salina St., Syracuse NY 13205. Please send by Nov. 12.

— Ashley Kang



COMMUNITY TALK

Nov. 6

Group to hold conversation on I-81

On Sept. 18, Moving People Transportation Coalition raised the fundamental dilemma for many people: How we can avoid the problem of “winners and losers” when it comes to the best possible replacement alternative for the I-81 viaduct?

The public is invited to bring questions to the next scheduled conversation with fellow citizens from both the suburbs and the city to help define a new perspective that would be a win-win for all stakeholders.

The session is set for 7 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 6, at Pebble Hill Presbyterian Church, 5299 Jamesville Road in Dewitt.

The Conversations will be facilitated by Peter Sarver, executive director of the Alliance of Communities Transforming Syracuse (ACTS) and convener for Moving People Transportation Coalition.

Hasan Stephens

Nominated by Tedd Perry

By Alex J. Rouhandeh
The Stand Intern

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

A. When I became a father to my first child, Janna, and she was a girl, I felt on top of the world. Her mother got mad because I left the hospital and went outside to call everyone in the world to announce my baby girl had been born. It was the greatest feeling on this earth.

Q: *What can you share about your children?*

A. My daughter, now 20, is an amazing singer, and she's creative. She likes to draw and paint. She's incredibly introspective and she's a carer. She cares for the world and for people. My son Jayden, who's the middle child, is an amazing artist. He actually does graphics and drawing. He's incredibly intelligent. Jayden is an athlete. This kid's body, I don't know what he's eating, right? He's incredibly gifted at sports, and he's also highly creative and introspective as well. Amari, my youngest, is an amazing dancer. He's fearless. He has actually gotten in front of a crowd of a thousand people and just danced fearlessly with no worries in the world. I admire that about him. And, he has an incredible heart. He's the kid that wants to take care of mentally disabled people and to make sure everyone's OK and will walk the old lady across the street. His heart is bigger than everybody in the world combined.

Q: *Can you tell me about your father?*

A. I have an amazing relationship with my father. He is one of my best friends. I honor and admire him as a man. He taught me a lot about how to be a man but also deal with poverty. One of the biggest things that I remember from my dad is that he taught me that just because you grow up poor doesn't mean you need to act poor. That stuck with me. One of things that resonated with me most was that we're born in these situations, we don't have to become them. He's incredibly loving and



MEET FATHER HASAN STEPHENS: Stephens is surrounded by wife, Liztazia, and kids, Janna, 20; Jayden, 15, and Amari, 13. | Annaliese Perry, Staff Photographer

always sets an example. While he didn't get as far in education, he always made sure that we would.

Q: *What do you love most about being a father?*

A. Oh man ... I just think my kids are amazing. They are the most beautiful reflection of my best qualities but also my mistakes. And that's not a bad thing. I also love the opportunity to pass on what I've learned and multiply it. So, combine what I've learned from my parents with what I've learned from life and pass it on to them and then on to generation to generation. The opportunity to just help them do anything in their wildest dreams that I maybe wasn't able to do. I want to show them and mold them to be able to be great.

Q: *What advice do you have for first-time dads?*

A. I would say two things. Become incredibly spiritual. It's going to be a force that will help you through the hard times and guide you through the great times. Secondly, observe your life as the factor that is going to create who your children are. So, if you're at the early end make sure you recognize that every single choice you make will directly impact your children. You can shift in time long enough before it becomes too impactful on that kid's life. Kids watch, learn and repeat. You have to model your life, regardless of what you did before. You have to model your life after what you want to see your kid be.

Q: *Final thoughts?*

A. Fatherhood I think is one of the most important aspects to a child's development. We have to be sensitive. Oftentimes fathers are very tough and hardened because we have to carry families. I think we have to be mindful of our masculinities and challenge that ideal as constructed by society to shift it to a more healthy and less toxic masculinity. Because, toxic masculinity negatively affects children in a big way. Whether it's your daughter or son, it will negatively affect them. If you're a father, you must step back and self-actualize to make sure that you're the best role model or man your children could possibly see.

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WHERE TO GO FOR FREE COUNSELING:

- **Home Headquarters** at the Homeownership Center, 538 Erie Blvd. W.
- **City Hall** – 1st Floor, 233 E. Washington St.
- **NEHDA**, 101 Gertrude St.
- **ARISE**, 635 James St.
- **PEACE INC.**, 136 Dr. Martin Luther King W.
- **Syracuse Housing Authority**, 516 Burt St. (SCFCU branch)
- **Syracuse Community Connections**, 401 South Ave. (SCFCU branch)
- **Syracuse Cooperative Federal Credit Union**, 800 N. Salina St.

WALLET THERAPY

Citizens get free financial counseling and guidance from new program



> Empowerment counselor Thom Dellwo works with Serge Muhire advising him to work on his credit by applying for a credit card. | Cherilyn Beckles, Staff Photographer

By Jeff Kramer
The Stand Columnist

The city's Financial Empowerment Center offers free planning for a more secure future

Seriously, you need counseling. Financial counseling to be precise. That's the premise of a free city service — that every Syracuse resident, regardless of zip code or income level, can benefit from sitting down with a certified financial planning expert. Especially when it doesn't cost a nickel.

"Everyone can use this," said Mary Margaret O'Hara, manager of the city's recently established Financial Empowerment Center (FEC). "I'm trying to get my Mom to use this."

What's offered is not a group seminar or lecture. You call and make an appointment at one of the eight centers throughout the city. You bring your bills, a recent bank statement, basic health insurance information, a pay stub and your I.D. You should also bring a willingness to candidly discuss your finances and goals with one of the four city-contracted counselors. The initial confidential, one-on-one, session can last as long as two hours. Follow-up sessions are free as well.

Launched nine years ago by New York City in

response to the economic devastation wrought by the collapse of the housing market, the FEC concept has caught on nationally with 33 cities on board. Funding for two years comes from Bloomberg Philanthropies. After July 2021, Syracuse will need to sustain the local program on its own through grants, corporate partners and other sources.

According to FEC's manager, the center has cut debt for more than a third of its clients, but its overall success is greater than what it can do just for individual citizens. "We're going to have better, thriving neighborhoods and our community is going to prosper more," she explained. "Not only is [the FEC] great for yourself, but it's a great investment in the future of Syracuse."

Glenwood resident Brenda Muhammad first learned about the free counseling through Syracuse Cooperative Federal Credit Union where she does her banking. Under the counselor's guidance, she sold her home in Georgia. She had been paying the mortgage for 10 years but rarely used the residence after moving to Syracuse to live with her new husband Keith, a retired Syracuse Fire Prevention captain. Maybe selling a home seems like a no-brainer, but Brenda needed a nudge. Financial practices tend to get entangled with emotions. It was hard to let go of the house and the ties it represented.

"It was a connection," the retired court clerk said. "It was the first place I ever felt at peace."

But it was an expensive keepsake.

“I was sending Georgia an allowance,” she joked over coffee.

With the proceeds of the home sale, Brenda was able to open a money market account and pay off her credit card debts using utilities refunds. The sale also freed up funds for her new passion, a non-profit she started called Focusing Our Resources For Community Enlightenment (FORCE).

The volunteer-driven organization provides services ranging from CPR and child care training for older kids to disaster preparedness workshops and help acquiring low-cost Internet and computers.

The city’s Financial Empower Centers have 171 clients so far. On a recent Monday, a new client, Serge Muhire, who immigrated to the U.S. in 2018 from the Democratic Republic of Congo after years in a Rwandan refugee camp, allowed The Stand to observe his initial consultation with empowerment counselor Thom Dellwo at the North Salina office of Cooperative Federal. The interview was friendly but focused. As it proceeded, it became clear that Serge is in a pretty good place money-wise. He earns \$14 an hour as a night warehouse worker at a medical supply company. Household expenses are split with a nephew who earns slightly less. Impressively, the 29-year-old North Side resident has amassed \$9,000 in

savings, despite often sending money home to his brother’s family in Africa. His only debt is a travel loan for his \$1,200 flight to America, which he pays off in increments of \$180 every five months. His goals include taking college courses, perhaps in accounting, and owning his own home. Thom crunched the numbers and determined that Serge generates a \$1,500 monthly surplus more or less.

“In terms of saving and spending you’re doing a good job,” Thom concluded.

His advice: Get a credit card with a \$500 limit to establish credit (Serge has no credit score), and either don’t use the card or pay it off in full each month. He also suggested establishing an in-home mail collection point to avoid occasional lost bills that lead to late fees. Finally, he recommended rental insurance, a roughly \$20-a-month investment that can save a lot of heartache.

A follow-up appointment was set for December. Serge left the session feeling encouraged, not just about his finances but by the sense that in Thom he had found a new ally in his transition to his new country.

“He is someone who can help me,” Serge said.

Kramer is a columnist for The Stand. He 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

— Note additional reporting for this story contributed by Chandler Plante

SCHEDULE A SESSION

If you think the Financial Empowerment Center can help you, too, call (315) 474-1939 ext. 5 to make an appointment

To learn more, visit syrgov.net/FEC/

ON THE SIDE

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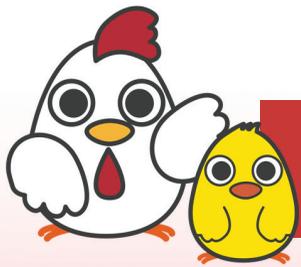
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- Charles Pierce-el

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Finding a better way to grieve



> iApologize's first Park & John Street Memorial Cookout took place Sep. 21. The nonprofit's founder plans to make it an annual event. | Sheila Quinell, Staff Photographer

By Alex Rouhandeh
The Stand Intern

How Rashawn Sullivan plans to turn a place of grief into a memorial that all can enjoy

For some time, the intersection of Park and John streets on Syracuse's North Side was a symbol of the neighborhood's misery. At this intersection once stood a two-story home that had long been abandoned and vandalized. Empty and decaying, the house was littered with hundreds of empty liquor bottles. Tattooed in spray paint across its walls read "rest in peace." In a way, the house stood as a memorial to those lost at this intersection. In another, it was a reminder of the merciless killings that continue to plague this city. And while the house has been demolished, its empty lot

remains like a fading scar reminiscent of all the tears shed on these streets.

Yet on a sunny September day, this empty lot played host to a crowd of roughly 100 smiling people. Hip-hop music echoed through the streets and gray smoke rose into the air as burgers and hot dogs were dished out to anyone hungry for a last bite of summer. Bringing energy and dignity to the lot has been the dream of Rashawn Sullivan, founder of the iApologize Foundation.

"My desire for creating the garden was to give people, family members, a better place to visit their loved ones instead of on some street corner that has been unattended to for months," Sullivan said.

Last year, 16-year-old Antonio Gullotto and 12-year-old James Springer III were both shot and killed near this intersection. Two years ago, 22-year-old John White was

LEARN MORE

For more on Rashawn Sullivan's work with iApologize, visit iapologize315.com

also killed here. Sullivan found the empty liquor bottles and RIP inscriptions marking their place of death to be “disrespectful” and radiating “negative energy.” To turn this space into one of inspiration and positive energy, Sullivan came up with the idea to transform the empty lot into a community garden.

“You wouldn’t want to live in a dirty house, so why have somebody’s energy living at a dirty memorial site?” Sullivan asked.

All proceeds generated from iApologize’s first Park & John Street Memorial Cookout go toward developing the empty lot into a memorial garden. Sullivan believes this cookout is one of the first steps in changing what memorials look like in Syracuse while also adding green spaces to areas which may otherwise not have them.

An important part of the garden’s initial development was the planting of two crabapple trees and a dogwood tree in honor of the young men who lost their lives at the intersection.

“The trees symbolize growth because that’s what we’re going to do, we’re going to grow from this,” he said.

Growth is something that has been vital in Sullivan’s life journey, albeit in a different way. In 1997, Sullivan, who was 17 at the time, murdered 18-year-old Jason Crawford in a drive-by shooting. Since his release in 2015, Sullivan has been dedicated to combating violence in Syracuse through public speaking, community outreach and inspiring others to take responsibility for their actions and move forward.

And though grief played a dominant role in the memorialization, residents who attended have pledged to

keep the lot alive. As attendees danced to upbeat hip-hop, others competed fiercely in friendly games of ping pong and horseshoes while kids took turns sparring with boxing gloves — all in good fun. Blunts were lit and passed as everyone chatted and soaked in each other’s company. If it weren’t for the number of people wearing black T-shirts reading “Long Live Tone,” you’d probably think this event was a block party rather than a memorial and recruiting center in the war against neighborhood crime.

“We just want to stop some of this violence,” said Tyrone L. Anderson, Gullotto’s great-uncle. Anderson believes getting the community together helps in steering young people away from risky behaviors. He hopes events like this will motivate those in tough situations to turn their lives around. “If I can do it, anybody can do it,” he said.

Anderson shared that during high school he started smoking marijuana which eventually led to using crack. It wasn’t until he met his current wife that he found the motivation to get clean. Anderson is 10-years crack-free, he says. He owns his own home, his own boat and his own trucks.

“Everything we got is paid for,” he said proudly. “It ain’t hard to do if you really want it.”

Part of iApologize’s mission is to mentor youth toward changing their lives and aspiring them toward greatness so they can one day create change in their communities. A way in which Sullivan works toward this is through partnering with other local nonprofits and organizations. One of which is the Onondaga Earth Corps (OEC) that provided the trees planted in



> Rashawn Sullivan with the Onondaga Earth Corps crew during the cookout. | Alex Rouhandeh, The Stand Intern

each victim's memory. The other is State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry, which plans to work with the victim's families in planning the garden's future development. Throughout the cookout ESF representatives were actively taking suggestions on the garden's design to incorporate in their plans.

"We're trying to figure out with this project what people want," said Alex Samoray a SUNY ESF landscape architecture student who is working with her professor, Maren King, in developing the garden. "A garden hopefully is a healing space. I think people think of nature as healing and as a place to reflect." Reflection and healing are two of Sullivan's main motives in creating the garden. At the cookout Sullivan initiated these practices with attendees during the memorial tree plantings.

At Sullivan's call, all 100 people move like a wave toward each planting spot for a moment of remembrance. The garden, which was filled with chatter and hip-hop, fell silent as a prayer is read for each of the young men: A crabapple tree for John White; a dogwood tree for Antonio Gullotto, and a crabapple tree for James Springer III.

"(I'm) just trying to keep his memory alive," said Wendy Voles, the mother of Springer III. "I'm not going to say this (event) will stop (gun violence) 100 percent. But I'm kinda hoping with all this going on that it can decrease it."

Sullivan has supported Springer III's family with their grief and continues to believe in the power that the community holds in bringing people together toward the common good. He plans to make the memorial cookout an annual event and will continue to create these spaces of healing throughout Syracuse.

Due to gang territories dividing the city and lack of sufficient public transportation, some individuals are unable to visit memorials on other sides of town. Sullivan hopes to address this while also uniting the city through the creation of memorial gardens on each side of Syracuse. His next intended spot will be on the South Side at the intersection of Cannon Street and West Lafayette Avenue, a spot to which he has strong personal ties.

This is the intersection where Sullivan grew up and used to sell drugs as a young gang member. He has also lost two friends to violence on this corner. Clifford Ryan, another antiviolence activist and the founder of OG's Against Gun Violence, lost his son at this same corner. This is why Sullivan plans to establish his next community garden here.

"There's a lot of loss," Sullivan said. "There's a lot of pain, a lot of hurt, a lot of suffering. I just wanted to do (these gardens) to give people a better way to grieve."



> The family of James Springer III pose for a group photo. | Sheila Quinell, Staff Photographer



> The street signs at the intersection of grief and hope. | Alex Rouhandeh, The Stand Intern



> Youth spar during the memorial cookout. | Alex Rouhandeh, The Stand Intern

ON THE SIDE

'YOU ARE NOT ALONE'

The Syracuse chapter of the National Stuttering Association meets at 6:30 p.m. the second Monday of each month, with each meeting taking place at a different Syracuse-area venue.

The National Stuttering Association's motto is "If You Stutter, You Are Not Alone." These meetings provide support and a safe environment to those who stutter.

Meetings are also open to parents, partners and friends of stutters, speech-language pathologists and students, and anyone who would like to learn more about stuttering.

To learn more, contact David Haas at davidhaaswmw@gmail.com or Vince Markowsky at vtmarkow@verizon.net or visit the Facebook page by searching for "National Stuttering Association Syracuse"

TELLING STORIES

How David Haas captures the history of Syracuse in photos

By Sarah Tietje-Mietz
Staff Reporter

The man behind @SyracuseHistory Instagram recently awarded for preservation efforts

When David Haas tells a story, people listen. Haas could be addressing a crowd, talking over coffee or delving into local history.

Whatever form it takes, he finds a captive audience, something Haas never thought possible in his youth.

Haas stutters. He has struggled with it since his youth, attending speech therapy from the age of 4 until after graduate school.

One percent of the population stutters, according to the National Stuttering Association (NSA). But not until grad school did Haas finally meet with other stutters or tell anyone outside his family he was in speech therapy.

Tom Scharstein, adult programs chair of the NSA, first heard of Haas through his talk at the TEDx Syracuse University conference.

"(I) knew right away this was a standout person," Scharstein said. "His energy and enthusiasm are contagious, inspiring multitudes within our organization. David is a leader. People listen to him and follow his example."

Now the Syracuse chapter leader for the NSA, Haas organizes and leads monthly meetings supporting others struggling with stuttering. He gives the yearly address to incoming master's students in speech pathology at Syracuse University.

"They have me come up and speak for about an hour and a half presentation," Haas said. "I get to go through my circle of life ... I call it my stuttering journey. It's awesome. I actually contact them now ahead of time just to ask: 'When am I coming? What's the date this year?'"



> David Haas was awarded one of two preservation merit awards last month. | Sarah Tietje-Mietz, Staff Photographer

A Syracuse native, Haas doesn't just share his personal story. He tells stories of his city and the places here that matter to him.

On a recent visit to the Palace Commons Cafe in the Eastwood neighborhood, he was greeted by a chorus of "Hi, David," from everyone inside. People in Syracuse know Haas, and Haas knows Syracuse.

Haas serves as the executive director of Sarah's Guest House, a facility located in the South Side providing lodging and other amenities to patients and families receiving medical treatment at Syracuse hospitals.

Haas brings his own experience to this role. At 19, his mother passed away from a long battle with cancer, and the perspective of dealing with this loss helped shape

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- Harley J. McKee Award: Norman Roth & University Hill Realty for rehabilitation of Morgan Dunne House
- Paul Malo Award: Chris Geiger and Holmes, King, Kallquist and Associates on behalf of the Sylvester Apartments Project
- Stewardship Award: Father Fred Mannara on behalf of the Most Holy Rosary Church
- Preservation Merit Award: Seward House Museum, Cayuga Museum of History & Art and Harriet Tubman Historical Park
- Jasena R. Foley Award: Cleota Reed for her decades of work
- CNY Heritage Award: Onondaga Historical Association and Willow Rock Brewing Company on relaunch of Congress Beer

his focus for Sarah's Guest House.

On his Instagram, @SyracuseHistory, he shares local history and stories through the homes and buildings of Syracuse.

Haas started the account in 2012 and, with close to 20,000 followers, his stories have found an audience. Some posts focus on people who once lived in these homes. Others focus on distinct architectural details. Each post tells a story and highlights why these places matter.

There is 406 Danforth St., once owned by a former New York senator and by one of the wealthiest women in Syracuse. The stunning Victorian at 523 W. Onondaga St. was built for Carroll Earl Smith, whose father established the "Syracuse Daily Journal."

One post focused on the doors from the former Yates Castle, now in storage at Syracuse University, which are all that remain from this building by famed architect James Renwick Jr.

"Sometimes you could envision how a story about a house or building goes along ... because these are places that can't speak for themselves, either," Haas said. "So I'm giving a voice to the voiceless, in different ways."

One post, highlighted in a Sean Kirst article for Syracuse.com, focused on 175 Parkside Ave., near the South Side. Haas had found that Helen Durney, the artist for the children's book "Dumbo," had lived and worked in the home.

Grant Johnson, president of the Preservation

Association of Central New York (PACNY) spoke about Haas and his work in bringing these stories to light.

"David has a way of honing in on what makes a place significant beyond just its architecture or the things that are obvious to someone that might self-identify as a historic preservationist," Johnson said.

PACNY honored Haas with its 2019 Preservation Merit Award, which is given in recognition of exceptional achievement in historic preservation. Haas won this award for his work with The Stand newspaper in organizing a special historic route for the 2019 South Side Photo Walk.

Haas was born, raised and is now a homeowner himself in the Eastwood neighborhood. He knows the history of his home, which was only owned once before him.

He purchased it from the children of the original builder. One of the grandchildren stopped by recently to pick hydrangeas from the yard for their wedding centerpieces. They even follow his Instagram account.

While he sees many leave the city they grew up in to pursue their passions elsewhere, Haas has no intention of leaving the area.

"Syracuse is so unique because one person can truly make a difference ... You can start a program in this city, see tangible changes," he said. "It could be an art project, it could be a business, it can be a volunteer initiative, anything. You can actually see things change."

GUEST HOUSE

Located at 100 Roberts Ave., **Sarah's Guest House** was founded in 1994 by Mary Keogh to serve as a "Hospital Hospitality House."

The space provide low-cost lodging, transportation, home-cooked meals and comfort for patients and families traveling to Syracuse for treatment at area hospitals.

To learn more, including current volunteer opportunities and to see a "wish list" of needed donations, visit sarahsguesthouse.org or call (315) 475-1747

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ADMITTED AT LAST

Timeline of William Herbert Johnson's life

- Born in Syracuse in 1875
- Undergraduate degree from Boston University
- Served in the Army in the Spanish-American war of 1898
- Enrolled in law school at the Syracuse University College of Law
- Graduated valedictorian in 1903
- Johnson died in 1965 at the age of 90
- Despite the fact that Johnson was not admitted to the bar, the minority bar association of Central New York was thereafter named the William Herbert Johnson Bar Association in his honor, and an award in his name is given annually by the College of Law
- Johnson posthumously admitted to the New York State bar Oct. 18, 2019, 116 years after passing the exam

— Source: Syracuse University College of Law

ACCESS GRANTED

William Herbert Johnson admitted to New York Bar after 116 years

By Keith Muhammad
Community Correspondent

First Black graduate of S.U. College of Law has achievements posthumously recognized

William Herbert Johnson, the first Black graduate of Syracuse University College of Law, despite being class valedictorian and passing the New York Bar Exam, was denied admission to the New York bar in 1903 due to his race. Sixty years later, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote in his famous “Letter from Birmingham Jail” that “justice too long delayed is justice denied.”

On Oct. 18, the Supreme Court Appellate Division of the State of New York posthumously admitted Johnson to the New York bar during a special ceremony held in the Onondaga County Courthouse, in an effort to correct this long-standing injustice.

“A moment like this stands out in the magnitude of its meaning not only to an individual or even a family, but to a people, a community and a generation,” exclaimed Professor Paula Johnson of the College of Law, one of the organizers of the effort to admit Johnson to the bar. “This individual certificate is not just an individual triumph. It is a testament to the fortitude, perseverance and belief of a family, a community and a people,” she added.

Although unrelated to the William Herbert Johnson family, Professor Johnson is now affectionately referred to as “Sister/Cousin Paula” by Thomas Johnson, one of the grandsons of William Herbert Johnson.

“This is a very exciting moment. It’s been a long time coming,” said Calvin Johnson, the oldest living grandson of William Herbert Johnson. “My grandfather was never a man to express his disappointment or his regrets about not being accepted as a lawyer. ... He just rolled with the punches and continued to be a man.”

Mayor Ben Walsh shared a story about Johnson’s legacy of kindness, giving and exemplary service to the community.

“He played a role in the appointment of William Gilbert, the first Black police officer in Syracuse, and Chester Whiteside the first Black firefighter,” Walsh said.

He also helped people interested in working for the city study for the civil service exams. Although William Herbert Johnson was a small man in stature, standing at 5’3” and weighing a mere 120 pounds, he gained a big reputation for his ability and achievement, according to those sharing memories of Johnson.



> A photo of William Herbert Johnson with a framed certificate admitting him to the New York State Bar Association. | Brenda Muhammad, Staff Photographer

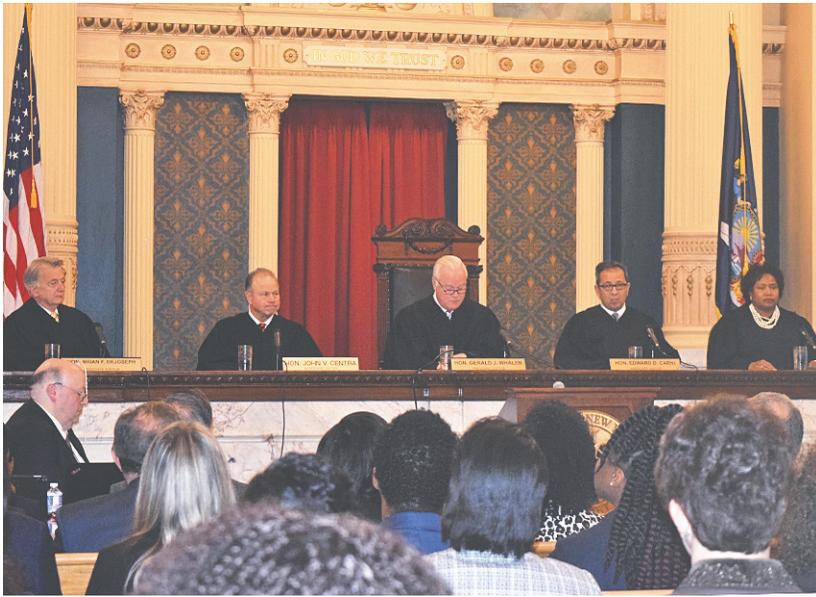
The Johnson family also opened their home to many Black students who needed respite from the racism they experienced on campus.

“Whether you were a student or whatever, you ended on the porch of 618 East Washington or the parlor of 618 when it was inclement weather,” Calvin Johnson recalled. “We helped many people of color, noted people of color, in this community get the things they needed.”

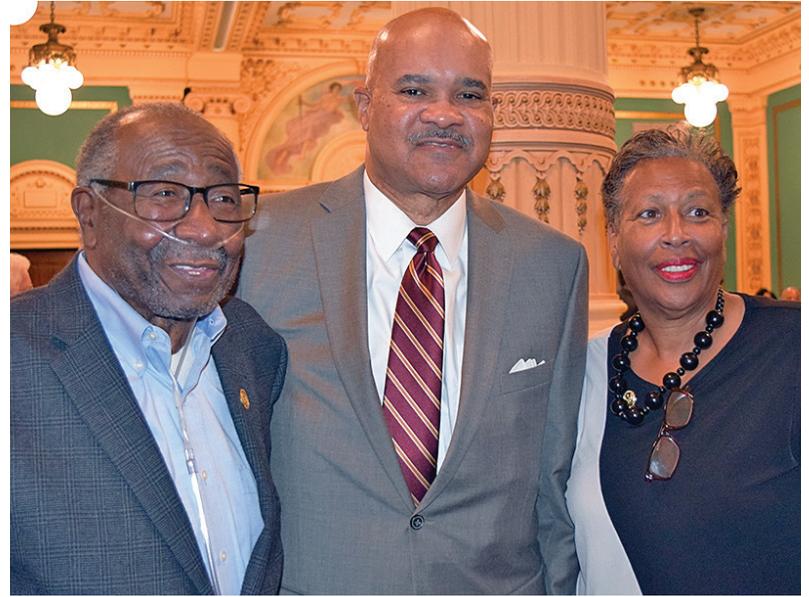
William Herbert Johnson often worked small jobs outside the practice of law to support his family. Although he wasn’t admitted into the bar, white lawyers sought his advice on legal matters behind closed doors. He was highly regarded by everyone in the community for his brilliance, depth of character and goodness.

“He was our lawyer regardless of whether he was appointed by the bar or not,” said Van Robinson, former president of the Syracuse Common Council. “This is such a memorial event. Who could have imagined: 1903 to 2019 before being recognized as a member of the bar?”

After 116 years, the time had finally arrived to bestow the honor and admission of William Herbert Johnson to



> Justices preside over the ceremony honoring William Johnson. | Brenda Muhammad, Staff Photographer



> From left to right, Van Robinson, Henry H. Melchor and Linda Brown Robinson attend the ceremony. | Brenda Muhammad, Staff Photographer

the bar. Mark Bennett, clerk of the court, read the certificate of admission after which the Hon. Gerald J. Whalen, presiding justice, signed it.

“Now Justice Whalen and everyone here today, let the record reflect — let the long arc of historical record reflect — that justice was done here today,” Professor Johnson exclaimed.

The Johnson family was presented a framed copy of the application

with the original signatures of the five justices to serve as a reminder of William Herbert Johnson’s greatness and determination.

“Today is a huge day for our family. One hundred and sixteen years in the making; a lot of work, a lot of tears, but a lot of pride. The journey is not over so we keep fighting, and we try to live by his example,” said Corey Mitchell, great-grandson of William Herbert Johnson, Esq.

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