

# the **Stand** south side news

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

Syracuse, NY

**FALL 2021**

**Issue 86**

**FREE**

## EMBRACING HOPE

Community photographers  
capture city life and its  
diversity over the summer

## FEAR FOR HOUSING

Syracuse renters need more support, local experts say

## speak up now

time is running out to  
submit comments to  
the state on I-81 plan

**Business**  
**in decline**  
Local dry cleaner opts to  
retire after slowdown caused  
by the COVID-19 pandemic

## SKILLED TRADES Q&A



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-  **SKILLED TRADES** | Labor advocate King Davis encourages people to join the trades and wants to see local, minority workers hired for the I-81 project.
-  **COMMUNITY** | Dry cleaners nationwide saw their livelihoods decimated when the pandemic hit. Hear from one local owner who closed for good.
-  **PHOTOGRAPHY** | Over the summer, The Stand's annual Photo Walk grew fivefold, offered a citywide photo contest and celebrated community photographers.
-  **FATHERHOOD** | Father Myles Williams works every day to give his son the childhood he never had.
-  **ROUNDTABLE** | Local experts on housing discuss the impact the coronavirus has had on Syracuse tenants, what's in store for the future and what systematic changes are needed.

■ Cover photography by Lisa Salisbury Hackley of Southwest Photo Walk participant Nancy Stewart as she dances with a passerby playing music from his portable Bluetooth speaker on July 24

UPCOMING

the STAND For full listing of events, visit  
MySouthSideStand.com/events/

**What:** I-81 Neighborhood Meeting  
**When:** 6 to 8 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 9  
**Where:** King Elementary School, 416 E. Raynor Ave.  
**Details:** The Department of Transportation will host a series of neighborhood meetings to discuss the I-81 project at locations throughout the city of Syracuse and surrounding suburbs. These smaller-scale meetings will take place in local schools and have DOT staff on hand to explain the project and respond to questions.  
**Special Request:** If you need an interpreter or have special needs, contact Curtis Jetter at (315) 428-4351  
**More Info:** Visit dot.ny.gov/i81opportunities

**Submit Comments**  
Online at bit.ly/3jeuePv      Deadline: 5 p.m. Sept. 14  
  
Mailed to either:  
  
Mark Frechette, PE.      Rick Marquis  
Project Director      Division Administrator  
NYSDOT, Region 3      Federal Highway  
333 E. Washington St.      Administration  
Syracuse, NY 13202      Federal Building  
11A Clinton Ave., Suite 719  
Albany, NY 12207  
  
Emailed to i81opportunities@dot.ny.gov  
  
By phone at 1-855-481-8255

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It's easy.

Contact Ashley Kang  
ashley@mysouthsidestand.com  
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AD DEADLINES  
Winter: Jan. 19  
Spring: March 23  
Summer: May 25



Collective power is the force behind many turning points in human history.

It is also the energy behind the growth of The Stand.

The many who stand with me — as the point person, serving all who wish to contribute in The Stand's mission — propel me, as well as the project.

This has taken years — even a decade — to build. But as a new volunteer joins the fold, suddenly another emerges. Word spreads. If someone has passion for this city and sharing untold stories, they become part of the team.

This past year, our team published countless online stories, produced five print issues and supported me throughout the pandemic to devise ways to inform readers and re-envision our most popular community outreach. Over the 2020 summer, we shifted from gathering for a Photo Walk to organizing a citywide Photo Contest. This summer, I wanted to see the Photo Walk return, while still being aware of how quickly things can change under a pandemic. To be flexible and safe, I chose a hybrid option: Contest and Walk. With volunteer outpouring, we offered five times as many Photo Walks than past years, leading walks on multiple sides of the city. The contest also continued and culminated with what I can only call a Photo Bash in celebration of the many talented community photographers who call this city home. View the winning images and read judges' feedback on Pages 10-17.

Collective power is defined as the capacity of a group to realize its common goals.

This force is also needed by others working in the community to serve residents — like the New York Civil Liberties Union and the Urban Jobs Task Force. Our reporters (view coverage online at MySouthSideStand.com) have covered their collective efforts for years.

Both groups are fervently working to address historical wrongs as plans begin to be set on the reconstruction of the I-81 viaduct. South Side residents, who will be directly impacted, have a chance in the coming weeks to provide input. Be a single voice, one that can grow, becoming an un-ignorable roar.

How can you contribute to this collective power? By submitting a comment to the New York State Department of Transportation, who must read and respond to every individual comment.

Does a single voice sound more powerful now?

Lanessa Chaplin, NYCLU Project I-81 counsel, says the I-81 project could be the catalyst for knitting back together what the highway destroyed. Her review of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), a government document outlining the impact this project will have on the surrounding neighborhood, finds three top insufficiencies.

- **Environmental Justice** — The health impact, especially air quality, for residents, young to old, during construction
- **Compensation** — Establish a land trust for returning land and assistance for residents who will need to relocate
- **Local Hiring** — Creation of legally-binding goals, monitoring and enforcement to ensure local, minority workers are on the project

— Ashley Kang



## Accolades Aplenty

This fall, three community contributors are up for Syracuse Press Club Awards:

### Print:

- **Best Column** for Jeff Kramer's "Census Concerns"

### Photography:

- **Best Portrait** for Mike Greenlar's "Light Display"
- **Best Photo Essay** for Mike Greenlar and Herm Card for coverage of the "CNY Bicycle Giveaway"

Additionally, student Reporter Sydney Gold, who reported jointly for The Stand and WEAR on a previous cover story, "Our Poisoned Kids," took home three honors this summer.

- **First Place in Writing Features** awarded by The Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Student Magazine Contest
- **First Place in News Story Writing** awarded by Associated Collegiate Press
- **Finalist for Best Audio Special Event Coverage** in the College Media Pinnacle Awards

## AUG. 14 MARCH FOR JUSTICE FOR I-81



| MIKE GREENLAR

# Paving Pathways: King Davis

By Michael Garcia  
*The Stand Reporter*

Working to provide a voice for all workers, King Davis, 64, chapter president of the Central New York Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, aims to help its members improve economic development and employment opportunities.

Davis has been involved with CBTU since the early '90s, and helped reinstate its charter, which had not been operating since that time. Before his term as president ends in 2024, Davis wants people to know that CBTU is an organization for everyone and will work with anyone interested in obtaining a job in the skilled trades.

In this new series on minorities in the skilled trades, Davis sat down with *The Stand* to discuss what can be done in order for younger generations to enter trade work, noting a main barrier is a lack of marketing for the field, as well as resources to obtain jobs.

*Q. What drew you to this career path?*

A. I was a New York state employee and member of the Civil Service Employees Association in 1986. Working for New York State, I became a CSEA representative, a union representative for my workplace. This got me involved in the field and made me realize I could be of help. By helping one person, that would sometimes help other people. I enjoy helping people, and the union was one way to do that. I had to retire early from my job because of a problem with my hands, and I had decided that

once I was able to, I wanted to get back involved with the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists because they're about being able to get good jobs without having to go to college.

*Q. How did you get involved with the union?*

A. When you're a state employee, you either have to join



**MEET KING DAVIS:** As the president of the local Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, he says he hopes CBTU can help minorities and those in poverty advance. | Justin Fogarty, Staff Photographer

the union or they take what they call “agency shop”(where employees pay service fees to the union to cover the cost of collective bargaining). So, you pay your dues. I wanted to join a union. I realized that the union is its members, not the people in Albany or whoever is sitting in the office. The unions are the members, and without the members’ support —member activism — the union can’t survive. That motivated myself to help the union, in turn help the members and hopefully, steer others to get involved. That includes helping people get union jobs, because when you have a union job, you have security and benefits. It’s almost like you have another family.

## READ MORE

Visit [MySouthSideStand.com](https://MySouthSideStand.com) to view the Skilled Trades Q&A launch. It features an interview with **Gerald Funderburg**, who works as a flagger at area construction sites and earns \$50 an hour.



*Q. What type of work did you do for the state?*

A. I worked for the Workers Compensation Board. I started out as a clerk, and I worked my way up to a senior examiner by taking tests. With union jobs, especially with state government jobs, you can take tests to move up. Once you're in the door, all you have to do is look for tests that you're qualified to take. If you do well, most likely you will be added to the promotional list. It doesn't require years and years of college. A lot of kids are discouraged today, because all they talk about is college and how expensive that is. Most can't afford that, especially here in Syracuse. We have almost over 50% of the population — the minority population on the South Side — living below the poverty level. To me, that is outrageous. With the I-81 project coming to Syracuse and all the jobs that it's going to bring, I thought now is the perfect time for the CBTU to be involved in the community again. I want to steer these jobs towards the people that really need them, people that were shut out 50 years ago when they constructed I-81. Now I'm trying to make sure that doesn't happen again. I had advantages growing up that are just not available today. So, anything I can do to help people better their lives ... to me, that's what life is about.

*Q. You were able to sustain yourself financially without a college degree?*

A. I dropped out of school when I was in the 11th grade. I was 16. I said, "I'm done with this. I didn't feel challenged." I went to a two-year college when I realized after a couple of years that I'm not going to get ahead without some sort of background. I went to Onondaga Community College, completed my associate degree and then got a civil service job. I was able to help people and earn a good paying job where I can move ahead ... there's stability in these jobs.

*Q. Was there anything that surprised you when you joined the union?*

A. Many think the unions take your dues and you don't get anything in return. But, you have support. They can't just come in and fire you. The unions have rules and regulations. Without you, there will be no union. That's something we try to promote.

*Q. Do you see change?*

A. I see some. People are starting to get more involved. Usually, it's always been the same faces. Whenever I've been on groups, committees or in meetings, it's usually the same people. But, now I see new members, some younger members in different organizations and meetings. What's been happening across the country, the George Floyd movement, people actually seeing what's going on, with cell phones and everybody videotaping ... People can actually see it. I see some changes coming, momentum coming. But, it's not quite enough. I'm hopeful that it keeps building and gets stronger.

*Q. What advice would you give to young people?*

A. Take the civil services exams. That's how I got my first job. A lot of jobs still only require a GED or high school education. As long as you take the test, you have a chance to get your foot in the door. Once you're in the door with a government job, you can bid on other jobs and take other tests ... without a four-year degree, without ever having to go to college, you can bid on jobs and move ahead.

*Q. What are some of the barriers to this work?*

A. A main barrier is people not knowing what's available to them or how to find out where it is. One way to do that is to bring that information directly to the community, bring it to the neighborhoods and the people that need it the most. If we can make those available, then we can really start to move forward.

## LEARN MORE

Onondaga County Civil Service exams announcements are available in the Onondaga County Personnel Department on the 13th floor of the Civic Center, 421 Montgomery St.

An exam may consist of the following tests:

- **Written** — Multiple choice questions/sometimes essays.
- **Oral** — Candidates appear before a panel to make a presentation.
- **Performance** — Evaluated on how well a candidate can perform a sample of the work.
- **Training and Experience Evaluations** — Each candidate's education and work experience is rated against the job requirements.
- **Physical/Agility** — Some positions require candidates to pass a physical or agility test.

— Source: Ongov.net

# FREE Cancer Screenings

## Call about FREE colon, cervical, and breast cancer screenings!

No health insurance? Call 315-435-3653.



## COVID'S IMPACT

Dry cleaners across the country saw business shrivel during the pandemic as work-from-home became the norm and individuals replaced work clothes for casual attire.

The National Cleaners Association predicts one in six dry cleaners will close this year, while the Dry Cleaning and Laundry Institute (DLI) estimates that the industry will shrink by nearly 30%.

Those still in business, seek ways to stay relevant while they wait for demand to return.

In a recent op-ed published in DLI's trade magazine "Fabricare," CEO Mary Scalco said she has noticed innovation and change among some of DLI's members.

"Members have taken the opportunity to work on their businesses over the past year; I'm not talking about production, I'm talking about the business," said Scalco, highlighting examples such as ditching physical locations and embracing social media campaigns. "Looking at their marketing, looking at their financials and looking to where they want to be when the economy fully reopens."

# INDUSTRY IN DECLINE

*Challenging pandemic year upends local dry cleaner's business*



> Jerald "Jerry" Sakran, a Thomas J. Corcoran High School alumn, says he'll miss the community and a job he dedicated most of his life to. | Eddie Velazquez, The Stand Photographer

By Eddie Velazquez  
*The Stand Reporter*

## Owner of Valley Cleaners retires after spending five decades on the South Side

In the dry cleaning business and in life, Jerald "Jerry" Sakran has learned a lot.

"If you treat people right, they'll treat you right," said Sakran, who owned and operated Valley Cleaners on Midland Avenue up until late June, when he officially retired.

The economic repercussions brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the longevity of his career, nudged Sakran to retire.

"Things got tough with the pandemic and business in general," he said. He feels for business owners — the "little guys" — all throughout the nation.

"The policies of our government are forcing businesses to close up and a lot of small businesses are get-

ting hurt because of the pandemic," he added. "I had (want) ads for help and couldn't get any. No one wanted to work because they were getting checks every week."

Working, at least in his view, is a matter of pride.

"People should want to work. You feel so much better when you work," Sakran believes. "I am speaking for myself, but it feels good to feel good about what you are doing. The dry cleaning business is in trouble."

When traditional economic activity started slowing down in spring last year, dry cleaning sales declined by approximately 85% virtually overnight, according to the Dry Cleaning and Laundry Institute.

Even with the difficulties small businesses and other local dry cleaners have faced, Sakran said he sees mom-and-pop enterprises as the source of innovation in the United States.

"Small business is America. It should be, period," he said. "Most who create jobs are small businesses. The small business owners make this country go."

More than anything, during his time cleaning



and sorting the garments worn by Syracuse residents, Sakran learned to understand the types of workloads he can manage.

“You learn things through experience,” Sakran said. “When you promise something and you learn you are not capable of (fulfilling that promise), you go, ‘We are not going to do that again.’ It is experience. You are a better person if you learn from that experience.”

Experience, he said, helped him ultimately make the decision to not take in any more orders back in April.

“I think people should know their limits,” he said. “Work got really hard. I was not physically able to do the job I wanted to do. So I had to close the store. Despite the fact that there was less work, I did not have the physical ability to do it anymore. Mentally I was pretty spent, too.”

Then, in June, Sakran said goodbye to the job he loved. More importantly, he said goodbye to a community he cared for and served for the vast majority of his life.

“The people in the South Side are wonderful. In 50 years, I rarely met someone who came in with an axe to grind,” he said of the clientele that frequented his shop on the corner of West Kennedy Street and Midland Avenue.

Sakran attributed the business’ success to the community.

“Everything I have is because of the people,” he said. “Everything I do is for them, and I owe them. I would like to think I was good to them, too.”

Although Sakran is stepping away from his business, longtime clients believe he is not done helping the community.

“He is still going to find ways to contribute. That’s who he is,” said Julius Lawrence, a South Side resident.

Lawrence, who frequented Valley Cleaners often, said Sakran and his

businesses were a symbol of stability in the community.

“If he had extra clothes, he would give them to different organizations,” Lawrence said. “He would take the clothes that were not picked up and he would give them to the community. Sometimes he would even dry clean for people for free.”

Sakran’s time serving the community earned him distinctions and decorations from multiple local elected leaders, including Mayor Ben Walsh, Assemblymember Pamela Hunter and Sen. Rachel May.

“I never asked for those things ... I appreciate them all, but I feel like I just did my job,” Sakran said humbly. “If they aren’t (recognizing those who have served the community for decades) already, they should.”

Now retired, Sakran finds time to play golf with his wife and do more of what he loves: being surrounded by those closest to him.

“I’m having some good times with my kids and grandkids,” said Sakran about spending time with his four children and nine grandchildren. “Do I miss the place and the people? Of course. It wasn’t an easy decision. It was one of the most difficult ones I have made in my life.”

More so than playing golf or bowling, which Sakran described himself as decent at, it is all about the comradery shared among friends and family.

“I am a social kind of guy. I enjoy being around people and telling stories,” he noted. “Interacting with people helps someone be a better person.”

As for advice for other small business owners and people in the dry cleaning industry, Sakran recommends a good attitude mixed with state-of-the-art equipment.

“If you are going to do this, you have to have the best equipment and be focused on what you do,” he said. “Be decent to people, provide good service and price things right.”

## THE BLACK EQUITY & EXCELLENCE FUND

supports community-based projects for the Black community of Central New York that promote and encourage self-sufficiency and improve the physical and economic conditions that affect quality of life.

It also encourages dialogue that will strengthen race-related matters and support social and educational growth in the community.

Since its inception in June 2020, The Black Equity & Excellence Fund has already distributed over \$500,000 in grants. For more information or to support the fund, visit [cnycf.org/equity](http://cnycf.org/equity).



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| ROBERT SCHULZ



| ROBERT SCHULZ



| SOLON QUINN



| EMILY KENNY



| KRISTINA RUSSO



| LISA KANE



| DYLAN SUTTLES



| ANNEKA HERRE

# Capturing Syracuse in Photos

**120 Entries**  
**22 Top Honors**

**A Dozen Photo Leaders**  
**Five Photo Walks**

**Hundreds of Pics Amassed**  
**And One Photo Bash!**

By Ashley Kang  
*The Stand Director*

This year's Photo Walk & Contest grew bigger than I could have imagined — in the best way.

Because of the on-going pandemic, we kept the walks small. But thanks to dozens of volunteers, we offered a total of five walks on multiple sides of the city. I again organized a photo contest, too, with a goal of capturing our city's diversity.

All these efforts culminated in a photo reveal and celebration of all our community photographers.

Photo judges — Ruthnie Angrand, Terry Baker, Marilu Lopez Fretts and Zau Nhkum — met Aug. 9 and spent nearly three hours reviewing entries in all four categories — #Scenic, #Portrait, #Street Life



| DIANE LANSING

and #Architecture. The winning images, along with honorable mentions, can be found in the following pages. Some images stood out immediately, and for others, deliberation took time.

Then on Aug. 22, community photographers gathered to see the big reveal of top picks screened by the Urban Video Project downtown at the Everson Museum. The evening started at Wildflowers Armory with an awards presentation, which also served as a fundraiser for the Syracuse Journalism Lab. This effort by the Syracuse Press Club in partnership with The Stand, Syracuse City School District, the Newhouse School and others in local media, aims to inspire talented high school students from underrepresented communities to pursue journalism.

Before the viewing, UNiTY Street Band truly made the night memorable by leading winners and guests via parade to the plaza.





| DYLAN SUTTLES



| MIKE GREENLAR

## LIST OF WINNERS

### FIRST PLACE:

- #Scenic  
Catherine Klapheke
- #Portrait  
Bobbi Griffith
- #Street Life  
J.B. McCampbell
- #Architecture  
LaTrenda Carswell

### SECOND PLACE:

- #Scenic & #Architecture  
Lisa Kane
- #Portrait  
Michaela Thorley
- #Street Life  
LaTrenda Carswell

### THIRD PLACE:

- #Scenic  
Sheavon Marshall
- #Portrait  
Keith Waldron
- #Street Life  
Michael Brown
- #Architecture  
Catherine Klapheke

### FOURTH PLACE:

- #Scenic  
LaTrenda Carswell
- #Portrait  
Rosalie Spitzer
- #Street Life  
Kristina Russo
- #Architecture  
Deborah Putman



# #Scenic

Capture Syracuse’s essence from a new vantage point

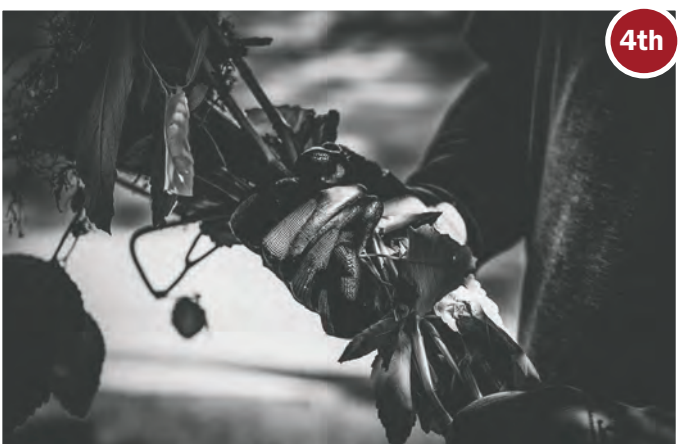


1st

> Three generations of the Manley family were anxious to speak with The Stand’s Photo Walk participants from their porch on Newell Street.

| CATHERINE KLAPHEKE

>>> *What judges had to say ...*  
“I like that with photography you can capture a moment. In this photo, there’s a human story. This image shows the scenery in Syracuse and the city’s diversity. The cropping, composition, colors and the expressions are strong. These three generations tell a story — the story of Syracuse.”



4th

| LATRENDIA CARSWELL

>>> *Judges ...*  
“The contrast is gorgeous. You see texture in the gloves and there are a lot of different things going on in the the shadows.”

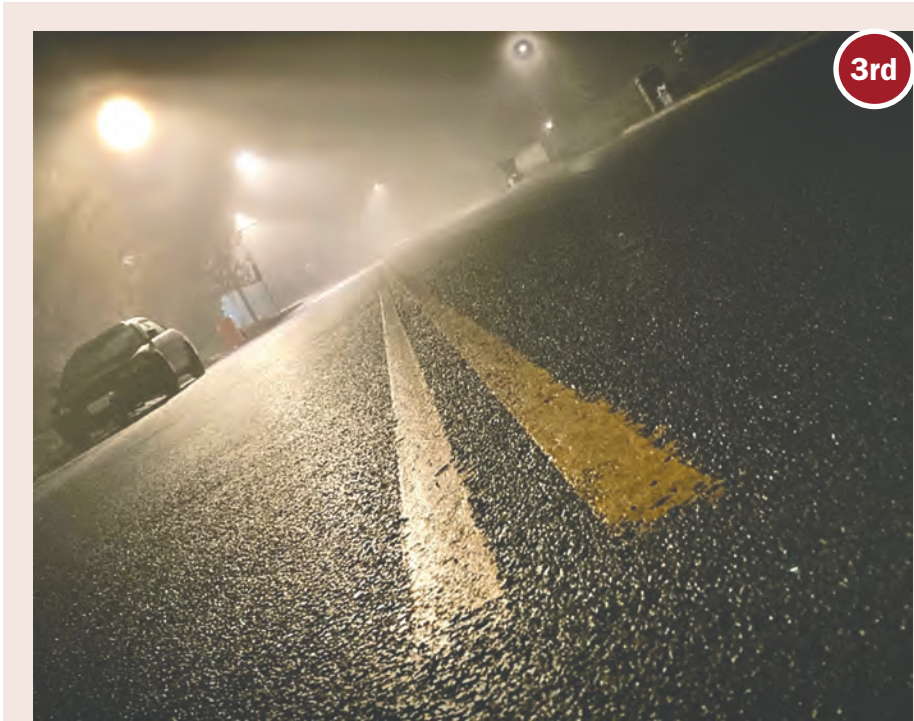




| LISA KANE

>>> Judges ...

“One of our most underutilized resources is the creek. When we think of city scenes, we think of buildings, but this shows a perspective of the city many are not used to seeing — right from a canoe. There’s graffiti on the wall but you’ve also got this rust on the bridge and greenery in the trees.”



3rd

| SHEAVON MARSHALL

>>> Judges ...

“The effort, creativity and thinking outside the box that went into this photo is great. I appreciate that the photographer experimented.”



HONORABLE MENTION

| ROBERT SCHULZ

>>> Judges ...

“When you fill the frame it is very pleasing. If you look close though, the man’s eyes are closed. Those split seconds count.”

VIEW MORE

Visit [bit.ly/3Bi6XCF](https://bit.ly/3Bi6XCF) to see all images entered into the #Scenic category.



# #Portrait

A shot of the many faces who call Syracuse home



> Clifford Ryan poses on Cannon Street by the tree of life that was planted in memory of his son, Duriel Lamar Ryan (May 12, 1982 - July, 22 1999).



1st

>>> Judges ...

“This is such a different view of Clifford. When you first look, you don’t know the full significance until you read the description. It brings feelings and a story into the portrait.”



4th

>>> Judges ...

“There’s something so beautiful about the age in this shot. The dignity this photo has ... the capture of her smile, the lines on her face and the silver in her hair.”

>>> What judges had to say ...

| BOBBI GRIFFITH

“This has great creativity and framing. Look at the angle of her leg, the fact that she’s looking directly into the camera ... Tyra Banks would pay for this photo!”

| ROSALIE SPITZER





| MICHAELA THORLEY

>>> Judges ...

"This image evokes the Fatherhood Q&A. There's great interaction between the pair, and the angle at which it was taken makes it feel like a hero shot."

## HONORABLE MENTIONS

>>> Judges ...

"Composition and use of lines is nice ... but I wish I could see a little bit more to one side or the other. The hard light, that harsh shadow and that little face peeking through creates curiosity."



| J. B. McCAMPBELL



| SADIE MAHAN

>>> Judges ...

"This is a crisp image with a focus on eyes but feels slightly forced."

## VIEW MORE

Visit [bit.ly/38jBkfq](https://bit.ly/38jBkfq) to see all images entered into the #Portrait category.



# #Street Life

A shot that best captures summer life from a Syracuse neighborhood



1st

| J. B. McCAMPBELL

>>> *What judges had to say ...*  
“This says summer all day long. I love, love, love the expression on the boy. It’s playful. It’s summer. As an action shot, it’s still clear and that’s hard to accomplish.”



3rd

| MICHAEL BROWN

>>> *Judges ...*  
“Good contrast. I feel like the photographer reduced the saturation almost all the way and left a hue, giving it a nostalgic feel. To me this says: ‘Come downtown and enjoy a concert.’”



2nd



| LATRENDIA CARSWELL

&gt;&gt;&gt; Judges ...

"Chance and opportunity of capturing this is a big plus. This is fun, funky and different. It's not how you envision weddings ... this is like Vegas in Syracuse."

## Nepali International Market

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• Cigarettes • Fresh Veggies • Cold Drinks • Rice • Fish &amp; Meats •



4th

| KRISTINA RUSSO

&gt;&gt;&gt; Judges ...

"This is a nice use of framing with the door. I like the moment that is captured, appearing to be between mother and son."

## HONORABLE MENTIONS



| DIANA GREEN

&gt;&gt;&gt; Judges ...

"Both of these messed with our hearts. It's not the street life we want, but it's a reality.

All the joy we see in the wedding and sprinkler is diametrically opposed to the memorials. These say a lot about this summer ... about many of our summers."



| DIANE LANSING

## VIEW MORE

Visit [bit.ly/3kzmt6x](https://bit.ly/3kzmt6x) to see all images entered into the #StreetLife category.



# #Architecture

Capture of our city’s angles, from Neoclassical styles to the Arts & Crafts movement



1st

>>> *What judges had to say ...*  
“The contrast by using black and white is striking, and the use of negative space brings attention to the detail on the National Grid building. This image is an ode to the film ‘Metropolis.’”

| LATREND A CARSWELL



3rd

>>> *Judges ...*

“This shot is visually interesting. It’s a photo that tells a story. The solo home in the middle is flanked by occupied homes. It breaks the rules. It challenges the viewer. It’s almost like you want to expand the frame to see the rest of the street. There are many layers to this.”

| CATHERINE KLAPHEKE



2nd



| LISA KANE

&gt;&gt;&gt; Judges ...

"This intentional crop is an unconventional look at our courthouse. At first glance, you might think you were in Rome, not Syracuse."

4th



| DEBORAH PUTMAN

&gt;&gt;&gt; Judges ...

"There's a nostalgia in the mural, and it almost feels like two photos fused together."

HONORABLE MENTION



| DIANE LANSING

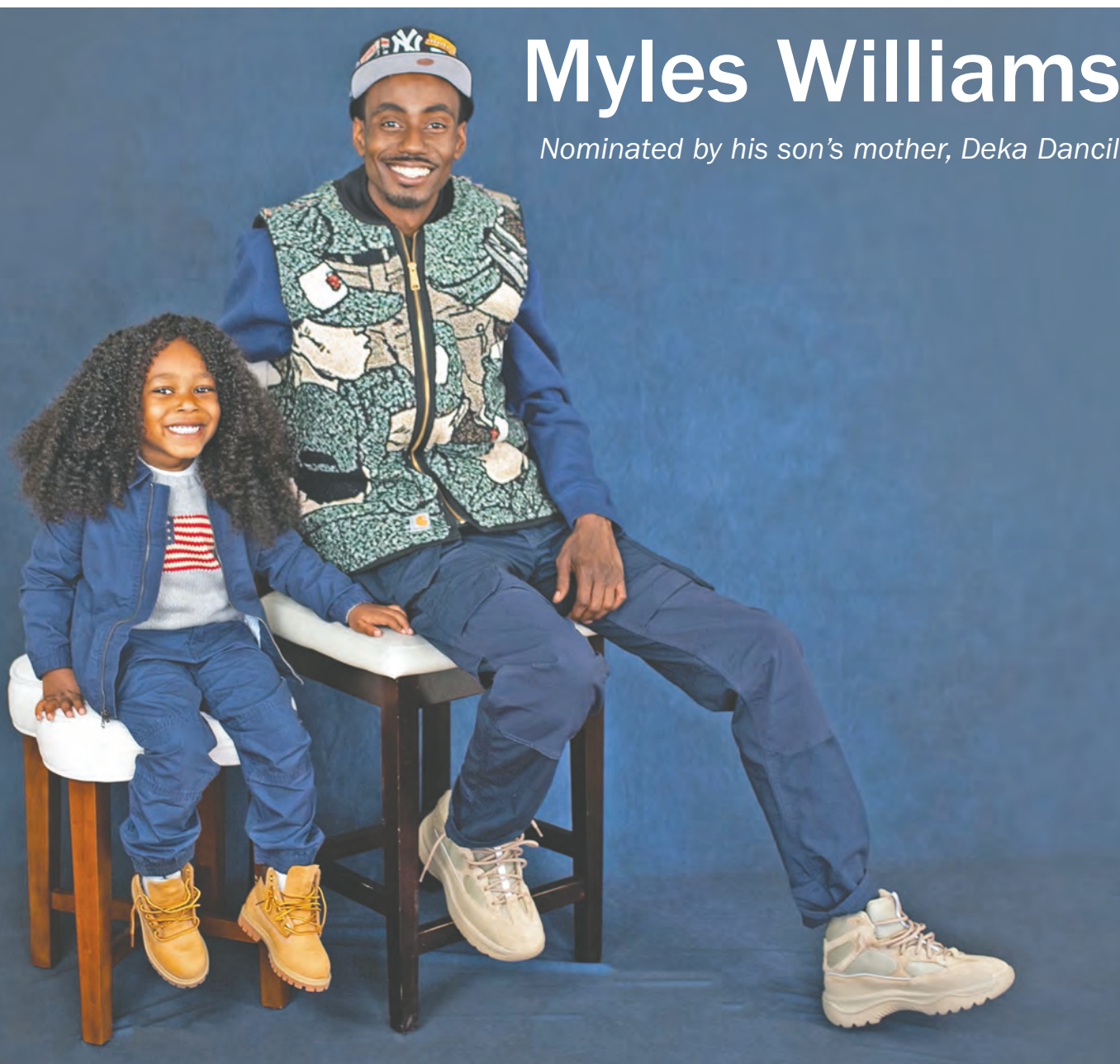
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# Myles Williams

*Nominated by his son's mother, Deka Dancil*

## MEET FATHER MYLES WILLIAMS:

A freelance handyman, Myles is a single father to Maximilian, 5. Every year on his birthday, the pair go to have photos made. "That's always the best birthday present," Myles said. "There's been nothing better, five years running." | Provided Photo

By Ashley Kang  
*The Stand Director*

### *Q. What did it feel like when you became a father?*

A. It was emotional. When he was born, I was bawling. I felt all the emotions. I was nervous. I was scared. I was apprehensive. I was excited. But when he actually came, I was boohoo crying ... just bawling, because it was the most beautiful thing I've ever see. There is no way to really explain ... seeing each other for the first time. I wish everyone can experience it.

### *Q. What can you share about your son?*

A. He's the greatest kid. He loves to be outside. He loves to run and swim. He loves "Sonic" and "Paw Patrol." He's very personable, a real people person. Everywhere we go,

people seem to love him, and he loves everyone. My brother recently got married, and Max was the ring bearer. He was the life of the party. He was on the dance floor from the time the reception started until the time it ended. He mingled with everybody and was fully immersed in their family. It was really beautiful to see. He's like my mini me; my best friend. I can't even explain it. This is why I'm having such a hard time with him starting school. Honestly, I don't know what I'm going to do with myself.

### *Q. How do you co-parent successfully?*

A. It can be challenging. I try to be understanding and available. I look at it like this: We're the only two people that came together to make this child, so it's on us to give him the best life possible. Regardless of our situation, we have to make the best life for this child.



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

A. I was around my son's age when I first met my dad. He'd stop by for a while, mainly on weekends, but then when I was 11, he got married. Soon after that, I stopped seeing him and haven't seen him since.

**Q. How did that shape how you act as a father?**

A. By him not being a dad, it taught me everything I needed to know about being a father. I really don't take advice when it comes to being a parent because I know there's no manual ... there's no set way. We're all going to make mistakes, but there's no correct way to do it. You have to grow and learn. A lot of it stems from who you are as a person. Your level of patience. There's a lot of stuff you have to deal with before you have a child. So for me, how I saw my father act showed me everything that I didn't want to do to my son. I remember being small and wanting my dad around for plays and stuff like that. Wanting him to come see me perform. Now, I don't miss anything with my son. Last year, I drove him to preschool every day. I made his lunch. We always sit and eat breakfast together. I do his hair. (My limited relationship with my dad) just taught me to be there full time — 100%. I don't want my son to ever need for anything.

**Q. Do you have any special traditions with your son?**

A. Two things. We go on vacations every summer. This summer, we went to Disney World; next, we're going to Nintendo Land in Japan. That's going to be hectic to work out, but I'm gonna get on it soon. Summer vacations is something I always look forward to. Then on my birthday, we always take photos. This is really special to me, and it's just the best birthday present I can get — spending time with my son.

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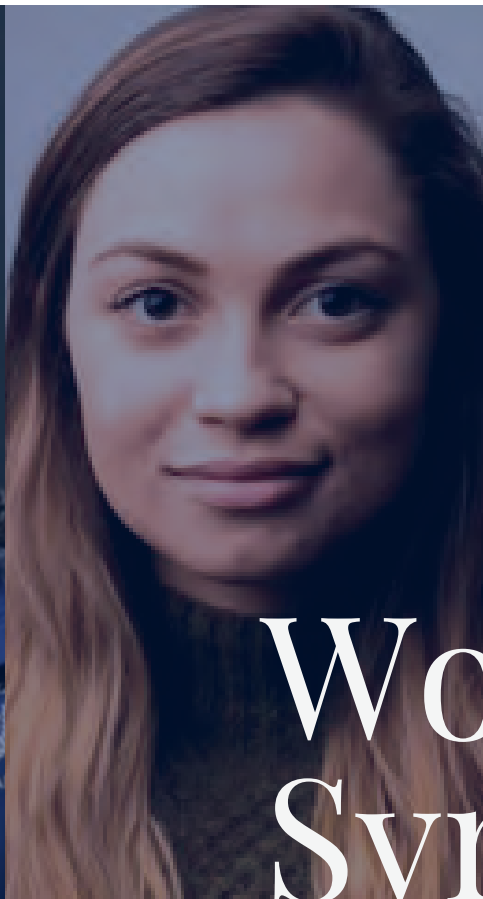
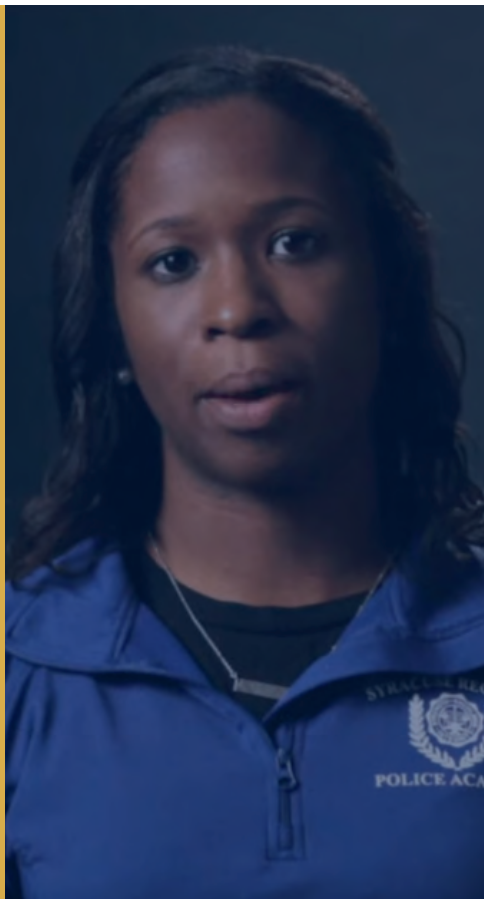
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# Work for Syracuse





# Housing Insecurity

> Nonprofit housing leaders Latoya Allen and Sally Santangelo say the COVID-19 pandemic only worsened the barriers and struggles that already exist for those seeking stable housing. | Justin Fogarty, Staff Photographer

By Eddie Velazquez  
The Stand Reporter

Local experts discuss the pandemic's impact on housing here in Syracuse and what's to come

Syracuse residents struggling to find fair and stable housing conditions have only seen those challenges magnify in the last year, according to local housing organization leaders and community advocates. These hardships merit immediate action, they say, before a significant number of city renters are met with eviction orders, brought about by the economic struggles sweeping across the United States.

In collaboration with WAER Radio, The Stand hosted a discussion with local experts on affordable housing, homeownership and community organizing in Syracuse.

In Syracuse, 61% of housing units are rented by city residents, according to 2019 U.S. Census Bureau data. Some owe several months of rent because of hardships encountered due the pandemic, which forced many low-wage workers home when hospitality and other businesses were closed or set to limited capacity by the state.

"The people impacted most in terms of housing during

*"I think people aren't being served by the systems we have in place currently."*

— Sally Santangelo

the pandemic are (those) impacted most by (general) inequities," said CNY Fair Housing Executive Director Sally Santangelo, referring to people with disabilities, people of color, female heads of household and families that lack access to childcare.

Economic instability, Santangelo said, is only one of the many issues plaguing these tenants.

"The struggles people were facing with inconsistent employment or struggling with issues related to mental health have been amplified," Santangelo said. "We see that in housing in a few different ways. People are



struggling to pay rent; they're struggling to meet the requirements of the programs that would help them."

Stephanie Kenific, with STOP! Coalition, said she has found the bulk of the issues are concentrated in the South and North sides of the city. She has canvassed those neighborhoods for the past six months, helping tenants better learn their rights as renters and directing them to legal aid.

"Living conditions for a number of tenants on the South Side and the North Side are awful and we have many landlords — I should say slumlords — who treat housing as a form of passive income," Kenific said. "They don't fulfill their requirement to provide safe and quality housing, yet they are happy to collect rent from their tenants. When it comes time for them to actually do their job, they become abusive and retaliatory."

Working through the pandemic at CNY Fair Housing, an organization that seeks to eliminate housing discrimination and promote equal access to housing opportunities in the region, Santangelo has also seen rapidly deteriorating housing conditions.

"People are facing codes and stability issues, which are a huge problem right now. Landlords have been deferring repairs and have not been keeping up with maintenance over the course of the pandemic," Santangelo said.

These issues have only magnified problems for those with housing instability.

According to an analysis done by the Community Benchmarks program at Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, 25% of Syracuse residents move at least once a year.

"We are facing so many issues right now that are making home homeownership even harder," Santangelo said. "Ultimately ownership provides the best stability for families."

Latoya Allen, the deputy director for Home HeadQuarters (HHQ), said she has seen an uptick in HHQ's homeownership classes. These eight-hour courses, Allen explained, take the home buyers through the process of acquiring a home.

"Our homeownership classes have increased dramatically, especially in this time," she said. "I don't blame people because if you've had to deal with a terrible landlord in these moments, you definitely want to have something of your own."

For Andrew Lunetta, the founder of A Tiny Home For Good and a longtime volunteer at homeless shelters, the pandemic has served to affirm confidence in his mission to help house military veterans and homeless city residents. Lunetta's organization builds homes with 300 square feet of floor space and offers some of the lowest rents in the city. Currently, his nonprofit houses 28 renters in single-occupancy units in the Near West, South and North sides of the city.

"It reaffirmed my belief in our work, providing safe housing to those who, if they were left to their own devices, the only thing they could provide would be a room in a house with shared bedrooms and code violations," he said.

Lunetta added it was difficult to feel a sense of stability at homeless shelters during the pandemic.

"When you are living 4 feet away from someone — there couldn't be a worse time to have to live at a shelter than when there's a pandemic going on," Lunetta said. He added A Tiny Home for Good's units are



> Andrew Lunetta and Stephanie Kenific discussed how already vulnerable residents have fared during the pandemic. | Justin Fogarty, Staff Photographer

## MEET THE PANELISTS:

**Andrew Lunetta** is executive director of A Tiny Home For Good, a nonprofit focused on supporting veterans and the homeless population in Syracuse.

**Latoya Allen** serves as the deputy director for Home HeadQuarters where she oversees special programs and homeownership outreach. She is a board member of Blueprint 15 and Common Councilor for District 4.

**Stephanie Kenific** is an organizer with Syracuse Tenants Organizing for Power (STOP! Coalition), an eviction defense campaign. Kenific is also a member of the local chapter of the Party for Socialism.

**Sally Santangelo** has served as the executive director at CNY Fair Housing for the past decade. This nonprofit works to eliminate housing discrimination, promote open communities and ensure equal access to housing opportunity for all in Central and Northern New York.



each individual, making them a safe location for his low-income renters during the pandemic.

From a home-building perspective, the pandemic has also made it difficult for construction companies to repair aging structures or erect new ones. “We build and manage all of our houses. Our build slowed to a halt because everything got more expensive. Contractors stopped showing up ... it drove me crazy because I saw how helpful (our project) was for our current tenants,” Lunetta said.

The National Association of Home Builders estimates that, as of June, lumber prices had increased 340% over last year.

All in all, Santangelo concluded, what is out there for tenants and those seeking safe housing is not working.

“I think people aren’t being served by the systems we have in place currently. (These) aren’t adequate to meet people’s needs right now,” Santangelo said. “I think maybe those systems weren’t adequate before but it is in stark relief now.”



> Latoya Allen shared her past personal struggles as a single mother, noting rent took up the majority of her income. | Justin Fogarty, Staff Photographer

## AVAILABLE AID

But what lifelines do struggling tenants have?

The federal eviction moratorium instituted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) aimed to prevent eviction for tenants who could report a loss of income in the last year due to the pandemic. Similarly, the eviction moratorium in New York state protected tenants who could soon face eviction.

Recently, the U.S. Supreme Court sided with landlords in a case that ultimately lifted a part of the eviction moratorium in the Empire State for tenants who present the tenant hardship declaration form as opposed to providing evidence in court. There was a push by New York lawmakers to extend the state’s eviction moratorium until Oct. 31 in light of the state’s failure to send out enough COVID-19 rental aid.

In terms of financial relief, Onondaga County received approximately \$25 million in federal funds to aid tenants impacted by the pandemic. The county’s rent relief program can cover up to 12 months of backlogged rent and has received more than 5,000 applications.

Allen said the application process for rent relief is obtuse and unfriendly to residents who have not been enrolled in social welfare programs before.

“The process was rough,” said Allen, who tried to go through the application process to learn how to help her constituents. “Most of these people that were actually applying for the program are people that have never had government assistance before. They’re not in the system already ... it was like a whole new world for them.”

Santangelo said the way the program is set up, alongside other social safety net programs, leaves people “in limbo.”

“(Rent relief) is there, and it’s held up because somebody can’t figure out how to make a functioning website in 2021,” Santangelo said. “This is baffling and frankly shameful. This is people’s housing.”

Eventually, those seeking aid fall through the cracks, Santangelo said.

“As these systems fail, it pushes people to not seek help that they’re eligible for because (residents who need help) don’t see things functioning,” Santangelo said. “We are seeing people existing outside of those systems.”

Immigrants are one of the populations who have had issues with the rent relief aid program, according to Kenific.

“When we canvass, folks with uncertain immigration status don’t even want to fill out the application for rental relief because they’re afraid of retaliation,” Kenific said.

The application for the program is typically found online and the city has partnered with 36 local organizations to help residents who request assistance.

“The federal government, every 10 years, assembles people to go door to door to do a census. Why can’t we do the same thing at the state level with the rent program?” Kenific questions. “What you have right now is a bunch of nonprofit organizations trying to visit houses, trying to get people signed up to the rent relief program, but there is no central planning.”

Since applying for aid is a joint process between both the landlord and the tenant, advocates say this highlights another hardship: navigating the tenuous relationship often found between landlord and tenant.

Allen noted some landlords could use the application as a weapon, while tenants largely lack a clear understanding of their rights as renters. “Sometimes anything tenants hear or whatever news they get from the landlord, they believe that that’s the absolute truth,” she said. “In most





> The expert panel gathered at Salt City Market's community room July 27, deliberating on what they have seen this past year while providing services to the community and what to expect in the future. | Justin Fogarty, Staff Photographer

cases, the landlord just needs you to do something so they can collect their money.”

Allen called for better mediation between tenants and landlords. For Kenific, that is a doomed relationship.

“I don’t think it can be improved when it comes to landlords who are trying to make a profit. Making a profit entails exploiting the people you’re profiting from,” Kenific said. “From organizing these last six months, I have seen some really horrific things in Syracuse.”

Kenific referenced the recently reported situation at Ballantyne Garden Apartments, where building management publicly posted a list of tenants who owed rent for all building residents to see. The STOP! Coalition organizer said this is a glaring example of an incompatible relationship.

“I’ve seen landlords just ignore, threaten or verbally abuse their tenants,” Kenific said. “These are problems that cannot be improved because the power differential between tenants and landlords is an unsolvable thing in our current system, which is why we need a new one.”

Santangelo said a good way to balance that relationship is to create better enforcement mechanisms to hold landlords accountable. One proposal is to strengthen the city’s code enforcement system.

“I think there are ways to make it so that landlords can’t exploit their tenants, but I think the difference is: can we have a system in which landlords make a living off of being a landlord?” Santangelo asked. “That is obviously a big question in terms of the ownership of property, but I think you can have a system in which landlords or housing providers can make a living without

exploiting their tenants.”

Lunetta, who has spoken extensively in the past about forging strong relationships with his tenants, said that starts with learning about the tenants’ situations. “It’s a relationship with our tenants that is built on me knowing their names, our board members knowing their names and knowing a bit of their history,” he said. “For us, the goal is not the bottom line. Our goal is to keep them in our houses for as long as possible.”

Looking to the future, advocates agreed public investment, tenant financial education and organization are key resource in uplifting impoverished people.

Allen said financial literacy is important, highlighting the Syracuse Financial Empowerment Center as a key resource in uplifting economically challenged populations out of poverty.

“People in poverty need to know how to get out of poverty,” Allen said. “But for most of the cases, if you have never seen it done before, then you probably don’t know how to do it. With the center, a (trained professional) will go through all of your finances and teach you how to get out of your situation.”

For Kenific, any plan for how to move forward should first acknowledge that high-quality housing is a universal right.

“I don’t care what crimes the person committed, what poor financial decision the person made or if they left their job for a bad reason. It doesn’t matter,” Kenific said. “They have a right to a place to live that is safe and sustainable. That is the starting point, and then we figure out how we house them.”



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