

## ‘Community Conversations Series’ begins with meaningful discussion on housing



*The Baltimore Times* opened its three-part Community Conversations series with a forum entitled “Baltimore’s Future: A Conversation on Baltimore’s Changing Neighborhoods” on February 22, 2020 at Impact Hub Baltimore. Community members, stakeholders, real estate investors and nonprofit leaders convened along with the editorial staff of the Baltimore Times to participate in a session centered around the importance of fair and affordable housing, home ownership and real estate investment. Standing: Nneka Nnamdi of Fight Blight Bmore, panelist; and Cassandra N. Vincent, Vincent Media & Consulting, Inc., facilitator for the discussion. Seated: Chris Ryer, director of the Baltimore City Department of Planning, presenter; Khalil Uqdah and Kyara Gray of Charm City Buyers, panelists; Joy Bramble, publisher, *The Baltimore Times*; Pamela Curtis of Park Heights Renaissance Inc., panelist; and LaQuida Chancey of Smalltimore Homes, panelist. (See article on page 10) Photo: Dr. David Marshall, Morgan State Strategic Communication Chair and Professor



# Driven with power, aligned with purpose

By Nikki Abraham  
Nucleus Team Member  
Positively Caviar, Inc.

My favorite line from Poet, Rumi, would be, “Set your life on fire and seek those who fan your flames.” There is so much power in this statement as life without passion can feel worthless. It is so important to live passionately and boldly in the direction of the dreams that are calling you. When you live passionately, you will be called to others and them to you to support your personal and collective evolution. There is power in community and purpose and together we not only can set our lives on fire but we can light up the world.

It was close of business on a Monday and my co-worker leaned over and asked me, “Is it Friday yet?” While I laughed, this question allowed me to reevaluate. If you come into your place of work on a Monday longing for Friday there is something wrong. That ultimately means the passion for the work you are putting in isn’t 100 percent and it may be time to reevaluate. Evaluation



**Nikki Abraham**  
Nucleus Team Member  
Positively Caviar, Inc.  
Courtesy Photo

and internal conversations are so important. Through daily prayer, I ask for alignment to make sure I’m serving my purpose and everything that God wants for me.

In life there will always be haters who may not believe in your vision and people around you who aren’t driven at your level. This may be easier said than done but you can’t let that affect or distract you from your purpose. Remember that this life is yours and today is also yours so, own it. Rise above the naysayers and separate yourself from others who t bring you down and do not have the same passion about life as you do. You owe yourself a lot in this lifetime—be relentless with your alignment and remember that you set the pace.

“Who you’re around is who you become,” is one of the most accurate statements and I’ve learned this through personal experiences. Over the past year, I made an effort to build meaningful relationships and surround myself with likeminded souls who are driven in spirituality, uplift me, have purpose, and that has made all the difference. Be picky with your inner circle.

In life, you will go through situations that may throw you off track and make you feel worthless or devalued. Growing in spirituality and self-confidence has given me the power to take a step back and say to myself, “It’s not me, it’s you.” I realized that I would often allow the implications of others, how they treated me and viewed me to ultimately impacted how I saw myself, my drive and the way I moved in life. Over time I also realized that comparison is the thief of

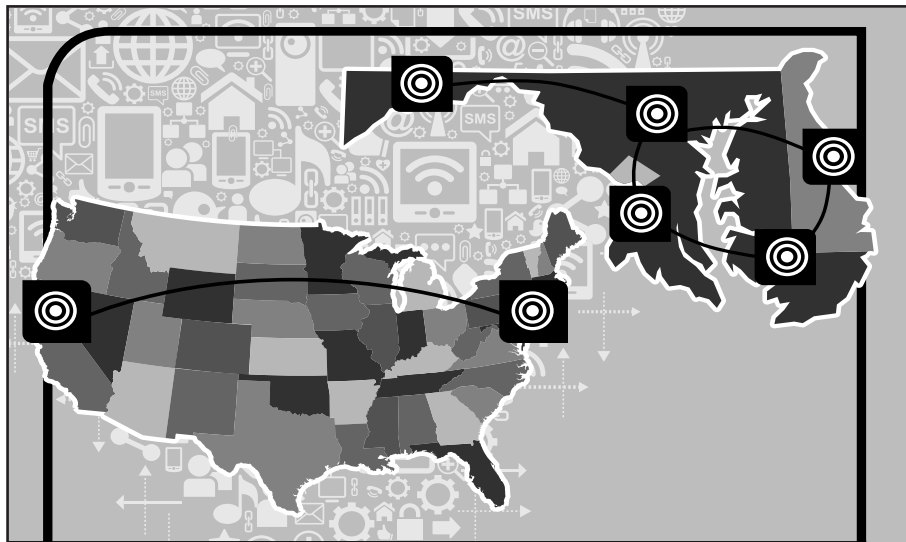
joy and there is only one me. Through that I made the conscious decision of no longer allow others to devalue my worth staying strong in my power.

Affirmations are necessary and important. According to PsychologyToday.com, affirmations are used to reprogram the subconscious mind, to encourage us to believe certain things about ourselves or about the world and our place within it. Manifestation is the key because once you believe it all is possible.

Start here: wake up every morning and give yourself reminders, “I am beautiful, I am powerful, I am worthy, I deserve the most.” Personalize your affirmations, write them down and make it plain, and watch these words come to life. Your mind is powerful, and you must fill it with purposeful thoughts.

There is power in purpose. Live a purpose driven life.

*Positively Caviar, Inc. (PCI) is a grassroots nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization focused on instilling mental resilience by way of positive thinking and optimism. Each month, a member of their Nucleus Team will feature a column focused on mental and physical health tips, scientific studies, nutrition facts and stories that are positive in nature to support a positive and healthy lifestyle. To learn more about how you can support, volunteer, or donate to Positively Caviar, Inc. visit: [staybasedandpositive.com](http://staybasedandpositive.com).*



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# Guest Editorials/Letters

## Katherine Johnson, a pioneering NASA mathematician featured in "Hidden Figures," dies at 101

By Lauren Victoria Burke, NNPA Newswire Contributor

Katherine Johnson, the legendary NASA physicist and mathematician whose work played a key role in the early successes of the U.S. space program, passed away at 101 years old on the morning of February 24, 2020 in Newport News, Va. Johnson played a pivotal role in helping the U.S. land men on the moon during the space race in the 1960s and was portrayed by actress Taraji P. Henson in the 2017 film "Hidden Figures." The book based on the film by the same name was written by Margot Lee Shetterly.

With little more than a pencil and a slide rule Johnson calculated the exact trajectories for Apollo 11 land on the moon in 1969. And, after Neil Johnson worked in a world where errors were fatal.

The lives of three brilliant African American women were featured in the book and subsequent film. They were Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, who passed in 2008, and Mary Jackson who passed in 2005. Vaughan and Jackson were from Hampton, Va. and Johnson was from West Virginia. Johnson graduated from West Virginia State University and West Virginia University. Johnson was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal on November 8, 2019, after House Science Committee Chairwoman Chairwoman Eddie Bernice Johnson's passed legislation to honor her.

"We're saddened by the passing of celebrated #HiddenFigures mathematician Katherine Johnson. Today, we celebrate her 101 years of life and honor her legacy of excellence that broke down racial and social barriers," tweeted NASA after news of Johnson's passing.

In September 1960 mathematician Katherine Johnson published NASA's first scientific paper to name a woman as author. Johnson's trajectory calculations were vital to the US space missions. "There were no textbooks, so we had to write them," Johnson said.

"It is with deep sadness that I learned of the passing of Katherine Johnson, a truly brilliant mathematician and pioneer. She broke down barriers as one of the few African-American women mathematicians working at the Flight Dynamics and Control Division at NASA Langley," wrote Congressman Bobby Scott who represents Newport News, Va. "Her work helped put the first Americans in space and send the Apollo 11 astronauts to the moon, thereby helping the United States win the Space Race. While I knew Katherine Johnson and her family personally for many years, like so many Americans I never fully appreciated the work that she, Dorothy Vaughn, Mary Jackson, Christine Darden and the many other African American women at NASA, trailblazed for so many until their untold story was revealed in Hidden Figures. Mrs. Johnson was a true American hero, and we were so proud to have her call Hampton Roads home. I want to send my deepest condolences to her family and friends, and to everyone who was inspired by her remarkable life and work."

"Today we mourn the loss of an American hero and a pioneer for women and African Americans in STEM fields. Katherine Johnson played a pivotal role in the outcome of the space race during her 35-year career at NASA and its predecessor, NACA. Without her accomplishments and those of her fellow Hidden Figures, which went largely unrecognized until the last decade, the outcome of the Space Race may have been quite different. Her achievements and impacts on our country are great, and her loss will be felt by many. I send my heartfelt condolences to her loved ones and colleagues," NASA said in a statement.

Lauren Victoria Burke is an independent journalist for NNPA and the host of the podcast BURKEFILE. She may be contacted at [LBurke007@gmail.com](mailto:LBurke007@gmail.com) and on twitter at [@LVBurke](https://twitter.com/LVBurke)



## Letters to the Editor:

### Editor:

#### **Re: No Good Presidential Candidates**

President Trump continued the economic recovery and reinvigorated our military with increases in defense spending. Conversely, he weakened environmental regulations; moved funds from military construction projects to fund the border wall; and hurt our standing in the world, including our relationship with friendly countries. Trump continually lies about events and policies, and demeans the Presidency with his derogatory comments and gutterly uncivilized language. He garners attention with his negativity.

Trump has weakened our national security by attacking the FBI and intelligence agencies. These attacks are launched when he personally disagrees with the findings of the agencies.

I don't see any viable Democratic pres-

idential candidates. Sanders, a Socialist, and Warren, a fake Indian, hold radical views supported by leftists in their party.

Buttigieg is a former small city mayor with no national experience, and he showed poor judgement when he declared victory in the Iowa caucuses before the official results were in.

Klobuchar cannot generate a national following. Steyer and Bloomberg are looked down upon for trying to buy the election and Biden, who is highly qualified to be president, is aging.

Some of them are running to garner name recognition for other races.

We need Independents to run for President to represent Independents across the country.

**Donald Moskowitz**  
Londonderry, NH

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## *Only time will tell whether Opportunity Zones live up to their promise*

*By Christopher G. Cox*  
*Publisher and managing editor*  
*www.realesavvy.com*

The potential for Opportunity Zones to reinvigorate thousands of communities throughout the United States is regularly, praised by civic leaders and politicians, including President Trump during his State of the Union Address.

While Opportunity Zones clearly hold significant promise for attracting investment in otherwise neglected neighborhoods, it is still too soon to say they will be an unqualified success, according to Venroy July, a Baltimore-based attorney and partner with Miles & Stockbridge.

“I think Opportunity Zones are good, but you are not going to see if they live up to their real potential until later in the cycle,” July said. The first investors to take advantage of this tax-saving

opportunity, according to July, will be wealthy individuals who want to make major investments in “super attractive” projects.

“It will take time to see if capital goes into the next layer of projects and into areas that are not as attractive,” July added. “Once we get into the second and third layer investments, we’ll begin

An example of a Baltimore-area Opportunity Zone that July is familiar with is Yard 56, which is converting a former industrial site into a 20-acre, mixed-use project. In its first phase—expected to open this year—Yard 56 will have a retail center, grocery store and fitness facility, among other shops and restaurants.

a result of investment in Opportunity Zones,” July predicts. “Early investors are not going to be looking to do small investment projects; they will be looking to participate in huge projects that will be very capital intensive. If you put a big project in these neighborhoods that have been historically underinvested, in some cases the communities are going to be overwhelmed.”

July believes the real power of Opportunity Zones will be seen when smaller investments of several hundred thousand dollars, as opposed to tens of millions of dollars, create a significant benefit by “building on what is already in neighborhoods.” He would like to see minority participation in such projects pursued by churches, fraternities, sororities and other organizations that can pool their resources and invest in their own communities.

“There is already a trust relationship within these organizations,” July notes. “If they plan strategically, members can put together a well-thought-out plan for urban renewal in the communities where they live, without bringing about displacement. Such investments can actually enhance these communities, while also helping to create generational wealth for African Americans and others.”

*Christopher G. Cox is the publisher and managing editor of*  
*www.realesavvy.com*

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***“One frequently voiced concern, even among the staunchest supporters of Opportunity Zones, is the potential they have for causing gentrification in communities that see a sudden infusion of investment capital.”***

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to see the true potential of what Opportunity Zones can accomplish.”

Opportunity Zones were created as a component of the federal Tax Cuts and Jobs Act passed in December of 2017. Their purpose is to encourage investment in economically distressed communities by making it possible for investors to receive preferential tax treatment for investments made in businesses operating within nearly 9,000 Zones that have designated in every state in the United States, as well as in the District of Columbia and five U.S. territories.

Plans for Phase II include a variety of office spaces, residential units, more retail stores, and a hotel. Located near the Johns Hopkins Bayview medical campus, Yard 56 is being developed by P. David Bramble, principal with MCB Real Estate LLC, and his partner Peter Pinkard.

One frequently voiced concern, even among the staunchest supporters of Opportunity Zones, is the potential they have for causing gentrification in communities that see a sudden infusion of investment capital.

“Gentrification is going to happen as

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# Maryland Live! Casino celebrates Black History Heroes during Black History Month

By Timothy Cox

An enthusiastic throng of about 300 well-dressed folks gathered at the Center Stage area of Maryland Live! Casino in celebration of Black History Month on Thursday, February 20, 2020. Ten Maryland and District of Columbia business and community leaders were recognized for their contributions to their communities in a positive way at the 7th Annual Black History Heroes Awards.

Hosted by Live! Casino & Hotel along with the Maryland-Washington Minority Companies Association (MWMCA), the special affair saluted Luther “Luke” Atkinson, former Negro league Baseball Star, Satchel Paige All Stars; Adrienne A. Jones, Speaker of the Maryland House of Delegates, District 10; David L. Gadis, CEO and General Manager, DC Water; Joseph T. Jones, Jr., president and CEO, Center for Urban Families; Roz Hamlett, director of Multimedia Communications, Anne Arundel County; Le Gretta Ross-Rawlins, Baltimore Postmaster, United States Post Office; Bert J. Hash, Jr.’ former president and CEO, Municipal Employees Credit Union (MECU); Warner H. Session, Esq., principal and board member, Session Law Firm, P.C./Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority (MWAA); Janice Hayes-Williams, coordinator, Cultural Resources, Department of Planning and Zoning, Anne Arundel County; and Dr. David Wilson, president, Morgan State University.

Each honoree received a special plaque denoting their individual awards.

In a special commendation letter Maryland Governor Larry Hogan stated: “This celebration seeks to honor and recognize Black History Heroes. Maryland is steeped in African-American history.

Numerous African American leaders have called Maryland home, including Frederick Douglass, Benjamin Banneker and Har-



*The 2020 Black History Heroes honorees: (Front row, left to right) Roz Hamlett, director, Multimedia Communications, Anne Arundel County; Janice Hayes-Williams, coordinator, Cultural Resources, Dept. of Planning and Zoning, Anne Arundel County; Luther “Luke” Atkinson, former Negro League Baseball Star, Satchel Paige All Stars; Adrienne A. Jones, Speaker of the Maryland House of Delegates; Le Gretta Ross-Rawlins, Baltimore Postmaster, United States Post Office. (Back row, left to right) Joseph T. Jones, Jr., Center for Urban Families; Bert J. Hash, Jr., former president, MECU; David L. Gadis, CEO/General Manager, DC Water; Warner H. Session, Esq., principal and senior board member, Session Law Firm, P.C./Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority; and David Wilson, president, Morgan State University. Photo by Timothy Cox*

riet Tubman. We are proud to celebrate these and other historical heroes here in Annapolis, and across our state.”

The Rev. Jerome Stephens, community outreach director for Senator Benjamin Cardin, delivered the prayer and described the ceremony as “a worthy tribute to our leaders, past and present.”

Several of the honorees gave remarks during the ceremony, including the Speaker of the Maryland House of Delegates, Adrienne Jones, who discussed the

importance of educating future generations about influential African-American leaders in our nation’s history. She urged the crowd to take time to visit the two newly unveiled statues of Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass in the Old House of Delegates Chamber at the Maryland State House.

Former Negro League infielder Luther “Luke” Atkinson, 82, served as keynote speaker and offered insight into his playing days under the tutelage of legendary

Hall of Fame pitcher, Leroy “Satchell” Paige. Atkinson also discussed the racism that he and his teammates faced on a daily basis, the poor playing conditions and the meager salaries that players of his generation had to endure.

“Although my teammates knew what we were up against, we persevered. We all played for tomorrow and for the love of the game,” Atkinson said.

Atkinson now volunteers for the Hubert V. Simmons Museum of Negro League Baseball Inc., located in Owings Mills, Maryland where Rayner “Ray” Banks is exhibits manager and hall of fame co-founder. He pointed out that 2020 as the 100th anniversary of Negro Leagues Baseball.

Live! Casino & Hotel, part of The Cordish Companies is committed to diversity and inclusion is recognized as one of the top corporate philanthropists in the region. The Cordish Companies is committed to being a leader in the areas of diversity and inclusiveness. We embrace the diversity within the communities we serve nationwide, and we work with non-profit groups, civic leaders and civil rights organizations that, like us, are committed to ensuring the growth and vibrancy of their communities, according to the company’s website.

“We are incredibly honored to host the seventh installment of the Black History Heroes Awards at Live! Casino & Hotel, honoring African-American community leaders across Baltimore and DC,” said Zed Smith, COO, The Cordish Companies. “Commitment to diversity and inclusion is core to our company culture, so this event is very special for our team. The honorees being recognized are influencers that are impacting change for future generations and creating lasting legacy as we enter into a new decade. This celebration is just a small token of our appreciation for all of their efforts to positively impact the lives of others.”

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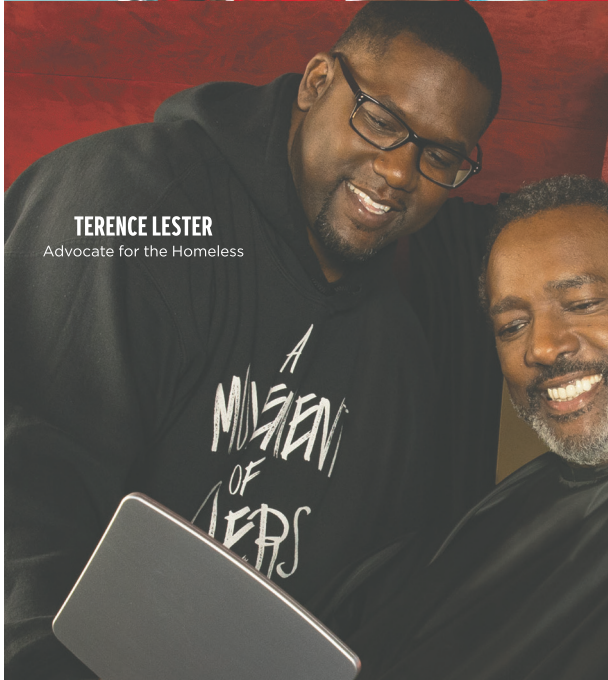
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#historyshakers



# Criminal justice lawyer. Activist, Just Mercy author Bryan Stevenson talks what everyone can do to protect their rights

By Nadine Matthews

Longtime criminal justice activist Bryan Stevenson emphasizes the importance of everyone getting involved and doing all they can to combat the changes that the two hundred and seven judges Donald Trump has appointed are sure to bring to the US judicial system. "It's a critical issue," he says. "There is a lot at stake."

Stevenson, whose thirty-year old non-profit Equal Justice Initiative is based in Alabama, stressed, "Without a commitment from our courts to enforcing rights for people who are often disfavored, we become much more imperiled."

The law has always loomed large in the lives of black Americans; literally defining who they are as people. Going back to the 1640 John Punch decision to the 1967 Loving decision allowing interracial marriages black Americans' freedom, mobility, and very existence is determined by who makes and enforces America's laws.

Harvard-educated Stevenson has been working as a defense lawyer and criminal justice crusader for over twenty years, freeing innocent men such as Walter McMillan from death row after many years. A major aspect of his work is keeping a spotlight on the gross racial disparities in the criminal justice system. His bestselling book "Just Mercy," chronicling his efforts, was recently made into a movie starring Jamie Foxx and Michael B. Jordan.

In addition to voting for a president who then nominates federal judges, many local judges are also elected. All must be treated with the same urgency. Stevenson emphasizes that absolutely everyone must vote in all these elections. There is no other option. "You do not have the luxury of not voting," he stated.

Stevenson also reminds us it's crucial to know who shapes the local judicial and justice systems. What often gets overlooked are the officials at the local level who ensure our rights are protected. For example, he says, every citizen should know who their district



*Bryan Stevenson in front of Lynching Exhibit at Legacy Museum in Alabama.*

**Photo credit: HBO**

attorney is. Stevenson states, "People need to know what type of policies are being implemented. In a lot of states you vote for judges, and most people don't have a clue. That has to change."

To find out the names of your district attorney just find a web browser and "Go to your county website and search for the district attorney."

Another important thing to do is find out if they have a Conviction Integrity Unit. "A lot of the most significant exonerations of the past years have been from Conviction Integrity Units." Find out what your prosecutor is doing to low-level, non-violent offenders. Finally, find out their stance on extreme sentencing such as subjecting children to sentences of life without parole.

We arrived at massive inequities in the criminal justice system, Stevenson believes, by people's ignorance either feigned or real. "We have to educate people and once we do that, people can't say they didn't know." To that end, Stevenson has branched out from solely being an actor in the criminal justice system to using culture to frame the narrative around America's criminal justice system, which includes the history from which it's derived.

Also located in Alabama, The National Peace and Justice Memorial and just steps away, the Legacy Museum, provides a symbolic thruway showing the connection from slavery to the disparities in law enforcement we see today. It is according to its website, "The nation's first memorial dedicated to the legacy of enslaved black people, people terrorized by lynching, African Americans humiliated by racial segregation and Jim Crow, and people of color burdened with contemporary presumptions of guilt and police violence. Says Stevenson, "It's shameful that it's the 21st century before we actually have cultural institutions that even talk about slavery or lynching."

Suggesting coffins, are 805 hanging steel rectangles inside the museum.. These name and represent each of the counties (and their states) where a documented lynching took place in the United States. Outside are corresponding temporary markers which each state is encouraged to retrieve and use for their own commemorations of lynching. Maryland has retrieved theirs. "There's been a pretty active movement in Maryland and the state legislatures actually commissioned people so there's this group of people working across the state

to erect markers on lynching sites. We've worked with people in Wicomico County, Anne Arundel County, Prince George's County. There is a pretty active community of people who are working on this."

The memorial is meant to raise awareness and frame the narrative and remove plausible deniability from the broader public. Stevenson stated, "The first challenge is to create institutions and to use our capacities to speak this truth to power, and then to hold people accountable for what they do."

After twenty years of fighting behind the scenes for justice, he saw that he needed to make his voice heard more loudly. "I realized, we should start talking more publicly to create the environment that we need to execute justice."

That was the impetus for his book and the movie adaptation. When the opportunity to film "Just Mercy" came around, he thought it would be a great vehicle for raising people's consciousness. "A lot of people will see a movie who won't read a book and if you can use two hours to get people to understand really complex issues and think about them, that's an opportunity you don't want to miss."



# Unified Voices presents Ursula V. Battle's 'Serenity House' March 20-22, 2020

*National recording artist Shirley Murdock to headline powerful stage play production that looks at opioid epidemic*

Baltimore— Chart-topping singer/songwriter/actress Shirley Murdock will headline the high-acclaimed stage play, Ursula V. Battle's "Serenity House: From Addiction to Deliverance." The show is being presented by Unified Voices (UV) of Johns Hopkins and Battle Stage Plays. LaKeisha McClendon is the show's Executive Producer. The production will be performed March 20, 21, and 22, 2020 in Johns Hopkins' Turner Auditorium located at 720 Rutland Avenue in Baltimore.

The stage play takes a riveting and thought-provoking look at the opioid epidemic. The production will also feature National Recording Artist Randy "Fruity" Roberts of The Choir Boyz, Mavilyn Statham of the legendary Clara Ward Singers, internationally renowned gospel female trio "Serenity" and Baltimore's own dynamic songstress Charisse Caldwell- Bowen.

Murdock will portray "Sister Claire C. Voyant," and will also sing in the production." Murdock's R&B hits include As We Lay, Go On Without You, Husband, and In Your Eyes. Meeting Bishop T.D. Jakes in the late 1990s, led not only to features on his #1 CD, but the realization of her lifelong dream to sing Gospel. He signed Murdock to his Dexterity Sounds/EMI recording label and her debut Gospel CD entitled, Home was nominated for a Stellar Award.

The following project Soulfood (Tyscot Records), received both Stellar & Dove Award nominations. Her latest project, The Journey is a live CD/DVD recording featuring Regina Belle, Kelly Price, and Beverly Crawford. The songstress' theatrical credits include Priest Tyaire's hit stage play, Mrs. Independent.

Roberts portrays "James Franklin" in the production, and will perform Watch Me Work from his hit CD This Is My Story This is My Song featuring "Kingdom." Serenity will perform several gospel favorites throughout the production. Dr. Gregory Wm. Branch is the Stage Director, while Howard "Buddy" Lakins, Jr. is the Musical Director for the powerful production, which will also include original music composed by the Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University student, Allen Branch.



*(Left) Gospel/R&B recording artist Shirley Murdock will headline "Serenity House: From Addiction to Deliverance." (Right) Director of the production, Dr. Gregory Wm. Branch with playwright Ursula V. Battle. The production will be performed March 20, 21, and 22, 2020 in Johns Hopkins' Turner Auditorium located at 720 Rutland Avenue in Baltimore.*

Courtesy Photos/Battle Stage Plays

"We are excited to present Ursula V. Battle's Serenity House," said Dr. Branch, who serves as Executive Director of UV. "Serenity House supports UV's mission which is to spread hope, health, and healing through harmony. We are so honored to bring in the legendary Shirley Murdock. She is headlining a show of extraordinary performers. People can expect to laugh, cry, and most of all, be uplifted."

The production is written by Baltimore Times writer Ursula V. Battle, who is being honored as a Women In the Arts 2020: "Valiant Women of Freedom" Honoree at Morgan State University on Saturday, March 14, 2020.

"Serenity House: From Addiction to Deliverance" centers around the journey six men and women— three months in recovery— after arriving at the imaginary United in Victory Tabernacle on the Hill Freewill Catholic Baptist and Episcopal Church of God in Christ's newly opened "Serenity House."

Through ministry, music, an unforgettable story and dance, the production takes a heart-wrenching, yet heart-warming look at the devastating impact that

addiction has on society— particularly on families that in some cases, spans generations.

The production also highlights the supernatural power of God to help us overcome, and the transformative power of forgiveness.

The performances are being dedicated to the late poet Maya Angelou, who penned, And Still I Rise. The show is also dedicated to "Cynthia," a woman who overdosed in front of the building where auditions for the production were held, but was revived by the NARCAN nasal spray.

Ursula V. Battle's "Serenity House" is rated PG-13 due to some strong content and profanity. Show times are as follows: Friday, March 20, 2020 (7 p.m.); Saturday, March 21, 2020 (Noon and 7 p.m.) and Sunday, March 22, 2020 (5 p.m.) Seating is General with doors opening 30 minutes before the performance. For additional information or to purchase tickets call 410-955-8888 or 443-531-4787. You may also visit: [www.unifiedvoices.com](http://www.unifiedvoices.com) or [www.battlestageplays.com](http://www.battlestageplays.com).

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# The Baltimore Times 'Community Conversations Series' begins with meaningful discussion on housing

By Demetrius Dillard

The Baltimore Times opened its three-part community conversations series with a forum entitled "Baltimore's Future: A Conversation on Baltimore's Changing Neighborhoods" on February 22, 2020 at Impact Hub Baltimore.

The meaningful discussion, made possible by a grant from The Lenfest Institute for Journalism and Facebook Journalism Project Community Network, was a way of bringing the community together to create informative sharing opportunities.

Community members, stakeholders, real estate investors and nonprofit leaders convened along with the editorial staff of the Baltimore Times to participate in a session centered around the importance of fair and affordable housing, home ownership and real estate investment.

Following the welcome address by emcee Cassandra Vincent and Baltimore Times publisher Joy Bramble was an informative panel discussion between Khalil Uqdah and Kyara Gray of Charm City Buyers, Pamela Curtis of Park Heights Renaissance Inc., Nneka Nnamdi of Fight Blight Bmore and LaQuida Chancey of Smalltimore Homes.

In addition to providing insight on their respective organizations and their community involvement, panelists covered a diverse array of subject matters, including opportunity zones, revitalization, improvements and innovation, investing in disadvantaged communities, redlining and gentrification.

Further, panelists identified unfair housing policies and practices and expressed solutions for what many may perceive as a worsening housing crisis in Baltimore - particularly for Black residents.

"There's a lot of information about how we got to today that most people don't know of. There's a lot of things that are happening today that people aren't aware of, so it's good to have these community assemblies," said Nnamdi, the CEO of Fight Blight Bmore.

"It also gives an opportunity for what they call creative collisions where people come together and create something au-



*(From left): Panelists Nneka Nnamdi of Fight Blight Bmore; LaQuida Chancey of Smalltimore Homes; Khalil Uqdah and Kyara Gray of Charm City Buyers; and Pamela Curtis of Park Heights Renaissance Inc. discuss current issues and solutions in the housing sector of Baltimore City at the "Baltimore's Future: A Conversation on Baltimore's Changing Neighborhoods" on Feb. 22, 2020 at Impact Hub Baltimore presented by The Baltimore Times. Photo: Demetrius Dillard*

thetically in that moment, and it opens the door for more collective and cooperative work going forward."

Community and economic development, social advocacy, building generational wealth, establishing partnerships and tax credit programs were among some of the solutions discussed along with actionable recommendations like developing in estate plans, seeking financial counsel and investing in land trusts.

"I do think that it's all about resource sharing, but more importantly it's about getting the word out there that these organizations exist," said Chancey, who has endeavors to reduce homelessness by creating more affordable housing through micro shelter and tiny home communities.

"So much of the work that's done in Baltimore is really siloed and kind of split up, and everybody doesn't know the impact that is happening around the city, so these kinds of conversations are necessary."

Chris Ryer, director of Baltimore City Department of Planning, delivered a brief presentation following the panel discussion. In his lecture, Ryer discussed the federal disinvestment in housing and presented a framework for community development as he identified "impact investment areas" and outlined a plan to work with community partners to redevelop underserved neighborhoods. Lucky Crosby Sr., a concerned resident

and public housing advocate, is part of an organization based in Sandtown-Winchester that represents public housing residents and low-income residents in distressed communities. He attended the community conversation and offered insight, too.

"I'm very concerned about the changes in the community, the type of demographics that's being brought in [and] the safety of the deconstruction of the demolition of the homes in my community," Crosby said.

To conclude the afternoon, participants engaged in a table talk facilitated by Nnamdi and Chancey, which was somewhat of an extension of the panel discussion. During the roundtable discussion, attendees asked questions, expressed concerns and exchanged ideas related to housing in Baltimore City.

One of the suggestions at the table talk was partnering with the educational system to implement financial literacy in the school curriculum in hopes of increased home ownership for future generations.

"I think there's a lot of very important information being imparted here and I highly recommend it," said Jacqueline Fulton, a pediatrician based in west Baltimore. "I just think that it's been very informative. For me, I didn't know a lot about housing and it's also letting me know about things happening in Baltimore that a lot of folks like me aren't



*Chris Ryer, director, Baltimore City Department of Planning, presenter*  
Photo: Demetrius Dillard

aware of."

Likewise, Erika Jernigan, came to the community conversation to support the Baltimore Times and connect with different resources available at the forum. Jernigan, the owner of Lexi's Lil Bug, a children's rideshare service that serves busy-working families in Baltimore City, Anne Arundel County and Baltimore County.

"I think it will make a major impact," said Jernigan, "especially if we're able to track all of the work that's coming out of the community conversations, and then be able to replicate these conversations in a bigger scale, so that way they're able to support and grow through the Baltimore Times."

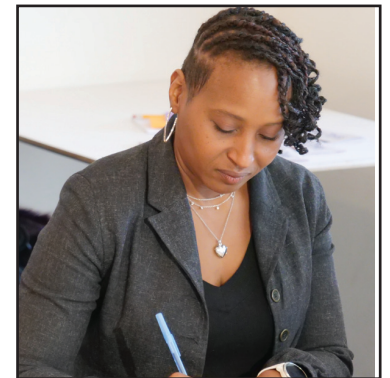




Participants engaged in a “table talk” facilitated by Nnamdi and Chancey



*Anthony Pressley, executive director, Druid Heights Development Corp.*



*Yolanda Jiggetts, executive director, Park Heights Renaissance*



*Paris Brown*



*Daniel DeVivo*



*L-r: Dr. David Marshall, Morgan State Strategic Communication Chair and Professor; SCOM students, MSU, Candyce Burke, and Jasmine Johnson*



*Lucky C. Crosby, Sr.*



*L-r: Dr. Jacqueline Fulton and Cheryl Casciani*

Photos on page 11: Dr. David Marshall



# Two prospects Baltimore Ravens should watch closely

By Tyler Hamilton

The Baltimore Ravens will have their eyes on plenty of prospects at the NFL combine this week. Two particular prospects should warrant more attention at the combine.

Oklahoma linebacker Kenneth Murray and LSU linebacker Patrick Queen would be instant starters. They will likely be available when the Ravens make their pick in the first round, which is currently the No. 28 overall selection.

Baltimore lost long-term starting inside linebacker C. J. Mosley after he signed a free agent contract with the New York Jets. They stumbled upon a consistent player with the in season addition of L. J. Fort. However, linebackers Josh Byner and Patrick Onwuasor are scheduled to become free agents.

Murray and Queen are the top options to be the next linebacker to be the heart of the defense. Queen has drawn comparisons to Mosley because of his outstanding sideline-to-sideline range in run defense along with his ability to cover tight ends and running backs. Two



*Oklahoma linebacker Kenneth Murray and LSU linebacker Patrick Queen would be instant starters for the Ravens. Both young men will likely be available when the Ravens make their pick in the first round. (Above) Kenneth Murray linebacker with the University of Oklahoma Sooners.*

Photo Credit: Caitlyn Epes/OU Daily

words best describe Queen— fast and physical.

Long-term ESPN NFL Draft Analyst Mel Kiper Jr. projected Queen to the Ravens in his latest mock draft. Kiper

gave his explanation for the pick during his pre-combine conference call.

"I think Patrick Queen would be a great fit for them. He's a three-down guy. He had a phenomenal career, great tackler. You saw that in the game against Clem-

son. He kind of saved them in a couple of spots in that championship game," Kiper said.

Queen played in 12 of 15 games last season. He posted 85 tackles, 12 tackles for a loss to go along with three sacks and an interception. Queen also broke up two passes.

Murray is an outstanding player as well. He started 14 games with a total of 17 tackles for a loss and four sacks to go along with four pass breakups. Surprisingly, Murray's 102 tackles last season was a step down from his 2018 total (155).

Like Queen, Murray is adept at roaming from sideline-to-sideline to track down running backs. Murray is a solid option in coverage, which makes him a three-down player. One of the advantages the Ravens had with Mosley was being able to have him stay on the field in nickel and dime packages. They'd have that same advantage with Murray.

Defensive coordinator Don 'Wink' Martindale was given a significant bump in salary recently. Baltimore will need to add more playmakers to make Martindale's system run at peak performance levels. Keep an eye on Murray and Queen as the draft process rolls on.

## OneUnited Bank launches new limited-edition Harriet Tubman Card

Los Angeles— OneUnited Bank, the largest black owned bank in America, introduces the new limited edition Harriet Tubman Card in celebration of Black History Month.

Harriet Tubman not only escaped slavery, she made nineteen missions to bring 300 others, including family and friends, to freedom. She also served as an armed scout for the Union Army and was an activist in the struggle for women's voting rights. Given her profound impact on American history, she deserves to be on the \$20 bill.

"We have the power to place Harriet Tubman on a global payment device in celebration of Black History Month," states Teri Williams, President & COO. "This symbol of Black empowerment in 2020 will pave the way for the Harriet Tubman design on the \$20 bill."

The Harriet Tubman Visa Debit Card



is the first limited edition card offered by OneUnited Bank and will only be available in 2020. The card image is from the painting "The Conqueror" by the internationally acclaimed artist Addonis Parker. Anyone who obtains the limited edition Harriet Tubman Card in 2020 can carry the card design for life.

In addition to its limited-edition Harriet Tubman Card, OneUnited Bank will promote the "Right to Vote" theme for Black History Month to elevate the #BankBlack and #BuyBlack Movements to the next level and beyond.

For more information visit: [www.oneunited.com/HarrietTubman](http://www.oneunited.com/HarrietTubman).

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# Annapolis Restaurant Week from February 29 to March 8

*Celebrating the 12th Anniversary of highlighting the culinary delights of Annapolis, Maryland*

Annapolis—Annapolis Restaurant Week started twelve years ago to support local restaurants in the off-season. It is a fun way to support our local restaurants, save a few dollars, have an amazing meal and get out of the house and enjoy time with friends and family.

This is one of the best times to eat out in Annapolis area restaurants. This year's event starts on February 29, which is Leap Day. The nine-day event runs through Sunday, March 8, 2020 and features over 40 of the Annapolis area's best restaurants. Those participating in this annual event will be offering price-fixed meal selections for just \$12.95 for a 2-course breakfast, \$15.95 for a 2-course lunch and a three-course dinner for \$34.95. Select locations will also offer additional bonus items and specials, which may include half price bottles of wine, discounted appetizers or specialty drinks.

"Due to the popularity of Annapolis Restaurant Week, we traditionally see a huge upswing in reservations at participating restaurants. So we encourage you to make reservations early especially if you are bringing a larger group," said Erik Evans, executive director of the Downtown Annapolis Partnership.

This year's dining options have also increased with four new restaurants joining in the event. The new participating restaurants include Rodizio Grill, Camp Severn Shore, Paladar Latin Kitchen and Rum Bar and Main & Market. Many of



the restaurants have also added options to accommodate vegetarian and gluten-free diners. For a complete list of all participating restaurants, locations, menus, gift cards and reservations, visit: [www.annapolisrestaurantweek.com](http://www.annapolisrestaurantweek.com).

This is the perfect time to try out new restaurants along with your favorites. The City of Annapolis has become a culinary dining destination over the

years and this event highlights some of the area's most popular dining destinations. Several of the area's local restaurants regularly make the list of the top restaurants in nearby metropolitan publications like the Washingtonian Magazine, Baltimore Magazine; and local publications including What's Up? Magazine and Bay Weekly Newspapers and the show Diners Drive-ins and Dives has

also featured participating restaurants.

"Annapolis Restaurant Week is popular with both locals and tourists. With so many dining options and specials you will want to go out to eat every day this week," said Matt Schatzle Chairman of the Downtown Annapolis Partnership.

For additional information, visit: [www.annapolisrestaurantweek.com](http://www.annapolisrestaurantweek.com)

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# Dreading a dental visit? Five tips for getting the most out of it

News & Experts— Many people would just as soon avoid scheduling a dental appointment, unless an unbearable toothache lands them reluctantly in the dentist's chair.

Fear of pain is one reason for procrastination, but it's not the only factor. People worry a routine checkup could reveal the need for expensive, major work. Wary patients also sometimes harbor doubts about whether a costly procedure is even necessary.

But patients can put themselves at ease and get the most out of their dental visit by fully vetting their dentist and learning how to weigh options, says Dr. Rick Mars (www.dentalcaregroup.net), author of *The Big Smile: The Principles of Modern Dentistry – for Dentists and Patients*.

“Many dentists don't do a good job of educating their patients and communicating with them,” Dr. Mars says, “and most patients don't do a good enough job educating themselves. We have a saying in dentistry that if you put 10 dentists in a room with a single patient, they will come up with 10 different treatment plans.

“But the great thing about dentistry is the multitude of creative solutions available to patients. You need to ask the right questions to make sure you understand the treatment options.”



Dr. Mars offers these tips for finding the right dental treatment at a fair price:

**Educate yourself and listen when your dentist educates.** “The worst thing that can happen is that you don't get the treatment you need and something disastrous happens,” Dr. Mars says. “The second worst thing that can happen is that you do get treatment, but you didn't actually need it. Taking an active role means you not only do your own research and get a second opinion, but you also listen carefully to your doctor when your doctor educates you.”

**Read online reviews with a critical eye.** “The internet can be very helpful

when you're vetting a new dentist, but there's also a lot of misinformation out there with patients' reviews,” Dr. Mars says. “In today's world, patients wield power like they never previously had. In general, people who bother to write reviews are disgruntled and want recourse and even revenge. On the other hand, numerous positive reviews, ideally from people you know who were treated by that dentist, can add up to a trustworthy referral.”

**Interview your dentist and their team.** “You can ask them how many times they've done a certain procedure and even ask to see photos of their cases,” Dr. Mars says. “It may require a specialist rather than a general dentist. And find out why they charge what they charge.”

**Get an honest second opinion.** “Even though you trust your dentist, you might hear a treatment plan that just doesn't sit well with you,” Dr. Mars says. “Get a copy of your radiographs from your current dentist to take to your second-opin-

ion dentist. Never show the second dentist your treatment plan until they give their final suggestions.”

**Ask to see the results of your dental investment.** “Rather than limit your evaluation of your dentist to time, cost, or customer service, think about your dental work like you consider mechanical work to your car,” Dr. Mars says. “After treatment, dentists can and should show you radiographs of your teeth and point out the details proving your problem is fixed.”

“If you've done your homework,” Dr. Mars says, “your dentist, whether a general practitioner or a specialist, should leave no room for doubt that you're in the right place.”

*Dr. Rick Mars is a general dentist and the author of *The Big Smile: The Principles of Modern Dentistry – for Dentists and Patients*. Dr. Mars has practiced patient-centered dentistry in the Miami area for over 25 years. For more information, visit: [www.dentalcaregroup.net](http://www.dentalcaregroup.net).*

## AMFM offering \$4,000 in grants for Summer Youth Program

Annapolis— Annapolis Musicians Fund for Musicians, Inc. (AMFM), a nonprofit organization that supports professional Annapolis musicians and music programs for youth, is pleased to announce that it is accepting applications for grants of up to \$4,000 from its David Glaser Educational Fund. The award will go to organizations in the greater Annapolis area whose summer programs benefit underserved students.

The David Glaser Educational Fund intends to offer underserved Annapolis youth exposure to the arts, particularly music.

“David, who was an incredibly talented Annapolis-based performer, songwriter, and music teacher, cared deeply about mentoring and giving back to his community. And he was a devout supporter of AMFM,” said AMFM President Matt McConville. “After his untimely passing from cancer in 2018, it seemed fitting to name our summer youth program grant after him.”

Applicants must be a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, be based in the greater Annapolis area, have an established active summer program that includes a strong music component, and must serve underserved youth. Applications will be accepted through March 15, 2020, and the recipients will be chosen on or about April 15, 2020.

To apply, go to [www.am-fm.org](http://www.am-fm.org) and click on the link for the David Glaser Educational Fund.

AMFM was created to provide financial relief to professional Annapolis musicians who cannot work due to sickness, injury, or any other circumstance leaving them unable to perform. It also provides music lessons for underserved children and gives scholarships to students majoring in music performance. The organization raises funds through donations and music events that showcase local professional talent. Its next fundraising show, “In the Vane of Van Morrison,” will be held on March 16, 2020 at Rams Head On Stage.

For more information about AMFM and the David Glaser Educational Fund, visit: [www.am-fm.org](http://www.am-fm.org).



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# Hairstylist on a one-women crusade to turn black hair salons into business powerhouses

By Curtis Bunn, Urban News Service  
A Division of Zenger

When Najah Aziz nodded off during an annual job performance review, she knew she had to make a move. She wanted out of the insurance business and into the hair salon, feeding a passion she developed as a child styling her six sisters' hair.

Quitting the security of corporate America after 16 years, she told Zenger News, came with a second ambition: to inject a new sense of professionalism into the African American hair industry.

Aziz eventually took the leap and put her evening cosmetology classes to work. Fifteen years later she is a nationally recognized stylist, owns the Like The River Salon in Atlanta and wages a one-woman national crusade with "Beauty Beyond The Hair" clinics.

She travels the country up to 20 times a year to run four-hour "look and learn" sessions, three-hour business seminars for salon operators and a seven-hour "Short Hair Boot Camp."

Students get a crash course on business etiquette, marketing, community service and client retention and growth.

"The model for African American salons has been broken for a long time," she said. "It's been broken in the way the businesses operated, the way business was conducted, the way stylists presented themselves, the atmosphere in salons.

"I was a client long before I became a hair care professional and so I noticed all the issues. I sat in a salon for six hours to get my hair done. I watched stylists talk on the phone as they worked. I saw people coming in off the street selling products to clients, while listening to rap music blast away.

"And none of it felt right. In fact, it was all disappointing."

Aziz hosts some sessions at her award-winning salon where she coaches stylists one-on-one and in groups. And she offers hour-long telephone mentoring to share business advice.

"I believe in her mission of being more professional in our culture because it allows us to move in arenas that were not available to us," Loriane Robinson, stylist and owner of In God's Hands



(Left) Najah Aziz quit corporate America to become a beauty industry influencer, teaching other stylists about client retention and growth, business etiquette, marketing and community service. (Right) Najah Aziz with Brooklyn stylist Gillian Garcia, who supports Aziz's mission. Courtesy Photos/Najah Aziz



Beauty Salon in Chicago," told Zenger. "We were completely blinded to the fact that the beauty industry is bigger than making money doing hair."

Robinson first spotted Aziz on Instagram and embraced her teachings in a 2016 session in Chicago.

"I've learned that our industry also has to first be about being professional, on time for work, building your image, social media presence, continuing to be a student," she said. "When we apply her knowledge, create new habits, we can experience this multibillion-dollar industry in a fresh and new way."

Jasmine Ashley, owner of a Los Angeles salon that bears her name, said, "Every time I see Najah she drops a jewel or several. I've learned from her that staying relevant, current and professional at all times holds more weight than stylists know."

Aziz said she started slowly with one or two clients a day. But she studied hair videos in her off-hours and observed other stylists' work, gradually building her clientele.

"My intent was always to educate

myself," she said. "Even now, all this time later, I'm excited about learning and improving."

Her salon is a soothing environment where clients have limited wait time because there is no double booking.

Aziz flexes her community-service muscle three times each year, offering complimentary hair care services to homeless women in Atlanta. "I believe in giving back," she said.

Her formula seems to work. More than 285,000 fans follow her on Instagram, hair magazines feature her work and annual industry mega-events like the

Premier Hair Shows and International Beauty Show give her platforms to teach and tell her story.

"Najah is so amazing," Brooklyn stylist Gillian Garcia told Zenger. "I support her mission. It's time the 'black salons' treat our gifts, talent and purpose with a little more respect.

"I totally love that Najah continually references her corporate experience because we are professionals also. She has shown you can be creative, professional and business savvy. She's released an inner power within me and I have not been the same since I met her."



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