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## *What Do You Say to Someone Battling COVID-19?*



*Correspondent Stacy M. Brown, wife Shenay (third from left) and family live in New Jersey. Brown and his wife began experiencing symptoms at the beginning of the week and were diagnosed with COVID-19 on April 3, 2020. He continues to write articles for The Baltimore Times. (See article on page 8) Courtesy Photo/NNPA*

# Tech leaders launch organization to provide underserved students with free laptops, Internet connection

By Stacy M. Brown

Think Systems Inc., a management, consulting firm that focuses on small and mid-market companies that need help with organizational solutions and strategic hiring announced a collaboration with a group of technology leaders to establish high-speed internet access and provide free laptops to students in Baltimore City.

The goal is to help students continue their education at home while schools remain closed.

Known as DigiBmore, the group is actively soliciting corporations and individuals for used laptops, notebooks and tablets that will be refurbished, wiped clean, and delivered to students in underserved areas of Baltimore who are out of school because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Baltimore City schools closed March 16 and, with the new shelter in place guidelines, will not be returning to school anytime soon.

“The DigiBmore working collaborative was formed on March 15 with a Facebook post pointing out the impact of the digital divide on students in underserved communities such as Baltimore,” said Ed Mullin, the vice president, and chief information officer at Think Systems, Inc. “We had our first Google Hangouts meeting on March 20, and since then, we have collected over 35 devices, with another 50 promised in the near term.”

From the devices collected, four have been distributed to students, with another 20 ready to go.

“So far, we have been using our personal networks to obtain donations. Our goal is to collect over 1,000, which would serve a significant portion of the students in need,” Mullin added. “To meet this goal, we will need public visibility on the initiative to reach a wider audience in hopes of increasing the number of device donations we are receiving daily. So all in all, it’s going pretty well, we have some momentum and expect it will continue to pick up.”

Mullin, who is also executive director of the Baltimore Robotics Center says DigiBmore would use the center’s 1001 W. Pratt Street headquarters as a com-



***DigiBmore is actively soliciting corporations and individuals for used laptops, notebooks and tablets that will be refurbished, wiped clean, and delivered to students in underserved areas of Baltimore who are out of school because of the COVID-19 pandemic. (Above) Tony Gruebl, founder and president of Think Systems, Inc. donated six laptops.*** Courtesy Photo

munity anchor to build a WIFI Mesh Network and initially connect residents who live in South Baltimore. The high-speed Internet access coverage area will extend to a four to five block radius.

DigiBmore founders include Adam Bouhmad, Founder Project Waves & Assistant Director of Technology at Digital Harbor Foundation; Andrew Coy, Executive Director at Digital Harbor Foundation; Jonathan Moore, Founder & CEO of RowdyOrb.it, and McKeever “Mac” Conwell, Portfolio Manager and Deal Team Coordinator for Maryland Technology Development Corporation (TEDCO).

“This is a critical moment where we all have to pull together to help bridge the digital divide in our city,” said Tony Gruebl, President of Think. “Today, every student needs access to the internet and to a device that will allow them to connect with teachers and subject matter even during a national crisis. There is no reason to stop learning, not even in a pandemic.”

The students served by the initiative

resources and work more quickly in addressing the issue head-on.

“There are thousands of underserved children in the communities we are looking to help, mass visibility of this initiative is what is needed to connect the haves with the have nots in attempt to lessen the gap.”

While the group was only formed recently, Mullin says many of the partner organizations had conducted similar outreach.

For example, the Digital Harbor Foundation offers a host of youth and educator programs focused on technology and making, as well as providing the Tech Center space where youth can experience hands-on, real-world, learning opportunities.

The Baltimore Robotics Center works to connect underserved youth with STEM programs like competitive robotics, 3D printing, coding, and making, along with facilitating internships and creating pathways to stable STEM careers.

RowdyOrb.it leverages broadband infrastructure, spurring economic development and community revitalization, from the ground up.

“We are a group of technology professionals passionate about serving the underserved in creating an opportunity that was lost by a child’s economic status,” Mullin said. “This shared passion has driven us to create DigiBmore, which focuses on providing equitable access for underserved communities.

“This access is not just limited too high-speed internet it’s inclusive of connected devices, reducing educational disparities, removing socio-economic redlining determinants, while greatly increasing unbiased growth opportunities within resource deprived Baltimore City zip codes.”

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# Pioneering University of Maryland dental professor receives prestigious William J. Gies Award

Baltimore— Valli Meeks, DDS, MS, RDH, clinical professor in the Department of Oncology and Diagnostic Sciences at the University of Maryland School of Dentistry (UMSOD) is a recipient of a 2020 William J. Gies Award Achievement – Dental Educator.

The honor, part of the annual William J. Gies Awards for Vision, Innovation and Achievement, recognizes the efforts of individuals, institutions and organizations that advance oral health and dental education.

“I’m still wrapping my head around that this is a national award from a nationally prominent dental organization recognizing me for what I think of as just doing my job. But it also galvanizes me to try to improve and do it even better,” Meeks said.

Meeks has served for just over three decades as director of UMSOD’s PLUS Clinic, the state’s first dental clinic for Marylanders with HIV/AIDS who have no insurance. Established in 1989, the clinic remains Baltimore’s primary facility to provide comprehensive oral health

services to uninsured and underinsured people living with HIV/AIDS.

“I am both pleased and proud that Dr. Meeks’ efforts over the past three decades on behalf of those living with HIV are being recognized with this prestigious, national award,” said Mark A. Reynolds, DDS, PhD, UMSOD dean and professor. “She has significantly improved access to oral health care for people living with HIV/AIDS, increased understanding of HIV/AIDS in the oral health community, and contributed to the quality of life for many.”

In 2013, Meeks also collaborated with the University of Maryland School of Medicine’s (UMSOM) Institute of Human Virology to introduce HIV testing in UMSOD clinics to identify, educate, and refer HIV-positive patients for needed care.

Additionally, she worked with UMSOM faculty and Marion Manski, RDH, MS, former director of UMSOD’s Dental Hygiene Program, to amend UMSOD’s predoctoral dental/dental hygiene curricula to include competency in HIV testing and identification of



*Dr. Valli Meeks  
Courtesy Photo/UMSOD*

issues that lead to disparities in health care delivery. As clinical trainer for the MidAtlantic AIDS Education and Training Center, she established the PLUS Clinic as a regional center for the diagnosis and treatment of oral lesions associated with HIV disease.

Her accomplishments extend beyond

the Mid-Atlantic community: In partnership with the Rwandan Minister of Health and Harvard School of Dental Medicine, Meeks was instrumental in launching a Bachelor of Dental Surgery program at the University of Rwanda College of Medicine and Health Sciences. This is the only dental school in Rwanda to offer a Bachelor of Dental Surgery degree; the Class of 2018 represents its first graduating class.

Known internationally as an expert on people living with HIV, she has given presentations in Brazil, Nigeria, Germany, Trinidad and England, among other countries.

Nonetheless, there is still much to be done, Meeks said. On her list is continuing to spread the message, particularly to youths, that HIV/AIDS is a preventable disease.

“Prevention of new cases of HIV is our No. 1 strategy for ending the epidemic locally. Getting the message to young adults and adolescents, as well as to those at risk for acquiring HIV, that HIV is preventable is a top priority,” she said.



## If I could do one thing, I'd have a daycare closer to work.

If you could do one thing for your community, what would it be? More daycare centers? More funding for Head Start? Completing the 2020 Census is a safe and easy way to inform how billions of dollars in funding flow into your community for hundreds of services.

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## No Easter for America?

By Dr. Glenn Mollette

Because of Covid-19 many churches will not be in their sanctuaries for Easter on April 12, 2020.

Easter Sunday can fall on any date between March 22 and April 25. The dates change because Easter happens on the Sunday following the Paschal Full Moon. The word Paschal means "Passover" in Greek, which is a transliteration of the Hebrew word pesach. The Paschal Full Moon is the first full moon after the Spring Equinox. This is sometimes referred to as the Egg Moon. This moon sometimes occurs in March and sometimes in April. So, April 12 is not locked in for Easter every year, but it is the date for 2020.

Easter 2020 will be remembered for a very long time, as the Sunday that America had no Easter or the Easter where churches did not gather in small and large buildings. This is disappointing to multitudes. It is the "one" Sunday that many Americans attend church. Globally, churches pull out all the stops for presenting their best music. Ministers have been working the last several weeks polishing up their sermons. But it's the same story, the old story that, once a year, people come to hear.

Some people still buy new clothes for Easter. Americans are more casual than ever but retailers still make out good for Easter, but not this year. Macy's and other retailers just furloughed hundreds of thousands of workers. For these retailers Easter has been cancelled and they are feeling it in their pocketbooks.

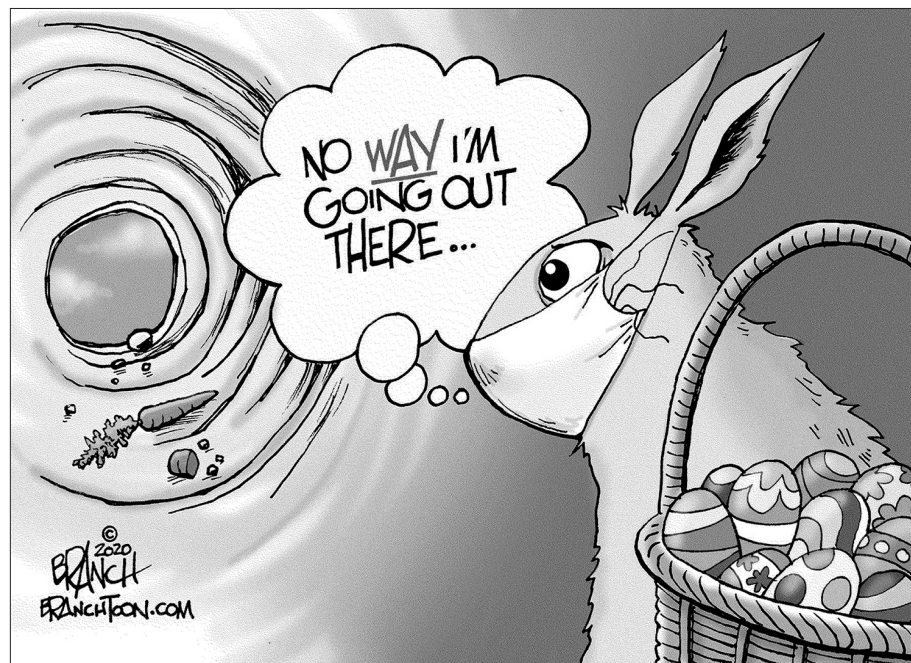
We don't know the date of the first Easter but we do know that the followers of Jesus were terrified. They had just watched him crucified on a cross and they feared they were next. Financially, they were struggling because they had left everything to follow Jesus. They had "sheltered" themselves in fear of the religious opposition.

That first Sunday morning Mary Magdalene arrived at the tomb to anoint Jesus' body. In the middle of her sorrow Jesus appeared, spoke her name and Mary realizing it was Jesus called him "Teacher." She must have put her arms around Jesus because he said, "Don't hold onto me, I have not ascended to my father." John 20:17 Essentially he said, "Don't touch me!" This story is more relevant all the time. The saddest weekend of Mary's life turned into the greatest day of her life as she became the first witness of the risen Jesus, later exclaiming to the disciples, "I have seen The Lord!" Wouldn't you like to have that kind of Easter? We will miss gathering in church this Easter but experiencing Easter and the risen Christ can happen even if you are alone.

There will be Easter on April 12, 2020. There will be Easter for every person on the planet who will take the time to celebrate the old story, the good news of Easter wherever you are and whatever your situation, this Easter 2020.

Dr. Glenn Mollette is an author and syndicated columnist. To contact him, visit: GMollette@aol.com or visit his website: [www.glenmmollette.com](http://www.glenmmollette.com)

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## Community Affairs

### Applications open for Philanthropy Tank Baltimore

*Funding for innovation available to Baltimore City students*

Baltimore – Baltimore teens are full of creative ideas to address pressing issues facing their communities. From planning inner-city gardens that bring fresh vegetables to local residents to developing STEM curriculum for young refugees, dozens of Baltimore City middle- and high-school students have been hard at work developing enrichment programs and activities to improve the quality of life in Baltimore.

Now, thanks to Philanthropy Tank, these Baltimore City students can apply for the financial support needed to make their philanthropic dreams come true. Through this newly launched initiative, Philanthropy Tank follows the Shark Tank model and awards students the funding they need as well as mentors to guide them as they bring to fruition their programs and activities.

Applications for the first year of Phi-



lanthropy Tank Baltimore open from April 1 through July 2, 2020 and are accessible at [https://webportaplapp.com/sp/login/2020\\_philanthropy-tank\\_baltimore](https://webportaplapp.com/sp/login/2020_philanthropy-tank_baltimore).

Applications will be judged on their potential for community impact, program feasibility, creativity and sustainability. The students whose applications qualify for funding will receive mentorship from Baltimore's leading philanthropists and business leaders.

They will present their ideas in a Shark Tank-style presentation on November 5, 2020. Each student-generated idea has the potential to be awarded up to \$15,000 for their program or activity.

## Ashes and Rubble

By Oscar H. Blayton

Unless you have serious psychological issues, you recognize the grave danger the COVID-19 pandemic poses for our global community.

This is a time of great loss. The worst tragedies are the loss of our loved ones. And, in addition to these heartbreaks, we also must bear the simultaneous catastrophes of the loss of income, the destabilization of our families and the destruction of whatever marginal security we may have had.

Because COVID-19 is going to leave communities around the world in ashes and rubble—financially, socially and emotionally—it is extremely important that we, as people of color, stay strong and focused.

This murderous virus does not discriminate based on race or economic status, but the social structures under which we live leave some of us more exposed than others to its dangers. And facts, borne

out by data, show that people of color and the poor are dying of the virus at a rate disproportionate to our percentage of the general population.

In the midst of this pandemic, it is not easy to see clearly all the circumstances contributing to the misery we now suffer. Amid the scramble to survive, we are left with little time to reflect on why

Orleans' Lower Ninth Ward, was flooded by Hurricane Katrina its rehabilitation was neglected because of environmental racism. These tragedies, which never would have been tolerated in predominantly white and wealthy communities, are only a few examples of environmental racism.

Interstate highways and exchanges cut

We should not despair, however, over the dangerous road ahead. Instead, we should take a lesson from our ancestors many of whom, suffered slavery or oppressive colonialism in times past. The generations that emerged from under these evils to educate themselves and their children while building lives, communities and institutions in the face of racism set an example for us to follow. We must support and rely on each other while demanding fair treatment from a reluctant government. Threats to our health and welfare have always been compounded by social injustice. And so it is with this COVID-19 pandemic.

With one arm we must shield ourselves and our communities from encroachments and threats like pandemics and, with our other arm, we must wield the sword of justice to eliminate public policy inequities born of racism and notions of white superiority and then inflicted upon us.

Our greater vulnerability to COVID-19 is the result of conscious and deliberate decisions by policy makers under the influence of racial bigotry and belief in white superiority. It is not enough for us to beat back this deadly virus. We also must also strategize and work to eliminate those injustices that make us the most vulnerable in its path. And, we must work with those who recognize these injustices in order to tackle these problems collectively.

Out of the ashes and rubble of this worldwide tragedy we must build a new and more just world.

*Oscar H. Blayton is a former Marine Corps Combat pilot and human rights activist who practices law in Virginia.*

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***“Environmental racism creates different worlds for different people. It created the toxic water crisis in Flint, Mich. It is one reason Puerto Rico has not fully recovered more than two years after Hurricanes Irma and Maria left it devastated in 2017. And, for years after New Orleans' Lower Ninth Ward, was flooded by Hurricane Katrina its rehabilitation was neglected because of environmental racism.”***

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it is killing African Americans and other people of color faster than wealthy white people. As in the fog of war, the fog of crisis narrows our focus on the enemy directly in front of us from moment to moment. And it takes critical analysis to understand why this is happening to us.

The answer to this question also reveals why whites generally live longer than people of color: We live in different worlds.

This might be an extraordinary thing to say if it was not for the reality of environmental racism.

Environmental racism creates different worlds for different people. It created the toxic water crisis in Flint, Mich. It is one reason Puerto Rico has not fully recovered more than two years after Hurricanes Irma and Maria left it devastated in 2017. And, for years after New

through predominantly black urban areas. Many urban areas populated by people of color are classified as food deserts by the federal government. And in a 1987 study titled “Toxic Waste and Race in the United States,” the United Church of Christ’s Commission for Racial Justice found that “indeed, race has been a factor in the location of commercial hazardous waste facilities in the United States.” Those facilities have been deliberately located in and near communities of color, resulting in a disproportionate number of individuals having their health compromised and being more susceptible to the COVID-19 virus.

For people of color, our fight for survival must be fought on multiple fronts, and now COVID-19 has opened yet another one.

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# Black Leadership Organization Continues Social Justice Movement

By Stacy M. Brown

For black social justice organizations in America, 2020 is a demanding year, with the presidential election, as well as other state and civic elections, the African American vote will be critical in many races. This year is also a census year, where everyone must be counted.

Recognizing these challenges, one organization has already mapped out programming to offer its network an extensive range of courses aimed at addressing specific needs.

Black Organizing for Leadership and Dignity (BOLD), is a national Leadership Training Program designed to help rebuild the black social justice infrastructure to organize communities more effectively and re-center black leadership in the U.S. social justice movement.

Focusing on African-Americans, people from the Caribbean and Africa, and Afro-Latinos, the organization offers training in various areas.

Highlighted courses this year, include: Transforming Conflict, Leading from Black Wholeness, and Assessing Political Conditions Together.

BOLD leaders say they have selected and prioritized those components of the organization's longer training to address specific needs that former participants have identified as long-standing issues in their work— each of which seems likely to present even greater challenges in light of 2020's pressures.

"If we are going to be leaders, particularly with the social justice movements, then our responsibilities as leaders is to ensure that we are both effective and careful, and not misleading folks," said Baltimore resident Tré Murphy, who has been involved with BOLD since its inception in 2012. "Part of the response to BOLD has really been that we can manage conflicts and, by more creatively and effectively, that has allowed us to hold our folks more accountable and not push ourselves out. So, we can mend conflicts more effectively."

The Transforming Conflict course is designed for individuals who are seeking to acquire skills to navigate movement and organizational conflict more effectively.

Leading from Black Wholeness is designed for directors and lead organizers to strengthen their connection



**BOLD is a national Leadership Training Program designed to help rebuild the black social justice infrastructure to organize communities more effectively and re-center black leadership in the U.S. social justice movement. (Above) Tre' Murphy (center) moderates a BOLD discussion with Courtland Cox of the Student Non violent Coordinating Committee (left) and Alta Starr, a BOLD Trainer (right). Courtesy Photo/BOLD**

to their "own innate resilience, as well as learn practices to cultivate that resilience, a skill that's even more necessary in times of increased pressure and stress."

The Assessing Political Conditions Together course explores how politics "lives in our bodies, and how we can shift those shapes in service to embody our political vision and analysis more powerfully and strengthen our ability to take more effective collective action."

BOLD has become the premier national training intermediary focused on strengthening the black social justice infrastructure by transforming the practice of black organizers in the U.S. to increase their alignment, impact and sustainability to win progressive change,

according to organization leaders.

In February, BOLD sought to continue to "unleash the collective powers of its organizers, trainers, mentors, mentees, alumni, Advisory Council members, and allies during its annual National Gathering in Baltimore. This four-day event brought together BOLD alumni from across the country and previous years' training to reflect and celebrate the year's progress.

"BOLD is one of the best-kept secrets where many don't know about BOLD. They find out through the network that it has been building," Murphy said.

For more information about BOLD, visit: [www.boldorganizing.org](http://www.boldorganizing.org).

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# What Do You Say to Someone Battling COVID-19?

By Stacy M. Brown,  
NNPA Newswire Senior Correspondent  
@StacyBrownMedia

It is human nature to want to say the right thing at the right time. To utter words that just might help heal.

I recall working at The Times-Tribune newspaper in Scranton, Pennsylvania, in the mid-2000s. I had been assigned the City Hall beat, which meant covering the most dysfunctional city council ever assembled. Things were so bad that Times-Tribune columnist Chris Kelly had a name for the many angry citizens who attended council sessions each week. He dubbed them “The Legion of Doom.”

One of the key members of the council, a swing vote for then-Mayor Chris Doherty, was also a high school principal and, by all indications, an all-around great guy.

Rumor had it that he was having an affair with a secretary at the high school. That rumor was confirmed when the councilman’s wife carried out her version of “Demolition Derby” at the school.

An education reporter was originally assigned to write the story because of the wife’s actions — it was now so public that we couldn’t ignore it. The reporter called the councilman’s wife and said something along these lines: “Can you tell us, how do you feel about your husband’s affair?”

The managing editor, assistant managing editor, and Chris Kelly were mortified by that line of questioning, and, since it had council implications, I was tabbed to handle the story.

Long story short, after that story, every time a family of a U.S. soldier got the devastating news that their loved one



Stacy M. Brown, NNPA Newswire Senior Correspondent  
File Photo

had lost his or her life in Iraq or Afghanistan, I was now the reporter to do the interview.

“You know how to ask the right questions,” the late John Murphy, then-assistant managing editor, told me. “You seem to know what to say.”

If Murphy were alive today, I would tell him that the coronavirus diagnosis that my wife Shenay and I received this week has rendered me with not a whole lot to say. I would say to him also that I’m leaning on the encouragement of family, friends, and colleagues — many of them understandably don’t know what to say. Some do.

I’m grateful for the tons of texts, emails, videos, and social media posts of support.

Whether it’s one word, a like on Instagram, Twitter or Facebook, or a full paragraph of someone expressing their thoughts, my wife and I are grateful.

Norman Rich, the do-it-all editor and content manager for the National Newspaper Publishers Association and BlackPressUSA.com, suggested I share with our readers some of the encouraging messages I’ve received.

Most of the messages were “I’m praying for you,” and many had the emoji for prayer or praying.

One of the best was a close friend who lives in Pennsylvania. He decided to leave a voice message that I retrieved from Facebook.

“Stacy, I’m sorry this has happened to you and Shenay. Anything — and I do

mean anything — that I can do. You know you can count on me. I’ll even send an uber with some ointment!”

The prayers and well wishes are great to have. Here’s a sample of others:

- “I can send you the antigen.”
- “Take Vitamin C and some Zinc.”
- “Breathe in some steamed orange peels and sea salt.”
- “You need supplies while they last?”
- “This is crazy, and I hope you feel better.”
- “What did the doctor say? Want me to talk to her?”
- “I know a guy in the State Department, want me to call him for you?”
- “Pace yourself. Don’t be anxious.”
- “Tylenol, bro, Tylenol.”
- “Listen, use natural healing. Don’t let the doctors kill you.”
- “The strongest weapon is patience.”
- “The most effective tonic is laughter.”
- “Don’t worry, have a lovely day.”
- “Stacy and Shenay, hang in there. I’m praying for you. Let’s Go Mets.”
- “You will get through this.”
- “I’ll drive all the way there. Just say the word.”

All of the words are encouraging. I’m happy to say that all of my family, friends, colleagues and others have known exactly what to say to me, and at the right time. If you’re reading this on a website or on a social media post, feel free to leave a comment or to share wishes for someone you know that is also dealing with this virus one day at a time.

Because of you all, I’m sure Shenay and I will beat this thing, and we will be in an even better position to help someone else.

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# Seven-year old brightens up day for friend with kind gesture

By Stacy M. Brown

As social-distancing has given way to stay-at-home orders, quarantining has also proven to be a struggle for students who haven't seen their classmates in weeks.

That was the case of Samson and Kaiden, two second-graders who admittedly have missed their typical school structure, and each other.

What happened next was captured in a ring doorbell video, in which dozens of people hit "like" when it was posted on Twitter by Danielle Davis, Kaiden's mother.

"So my son's friend rang the doorbell to surprise him with a letter explaining how much he has learned over the past week," Davis wrote. He rang the bell and ran back to make sure he was six-feet away."

Kristen Nichols, Samson's mother, explained that she and her son were doing some schoolwork. She said the English assignment for the day was writing letters.

"I asked who [Samson] would like to write one to, and of course, he mentioned his pal Kaiden," Nichols said. "We came up with the idea together. We thought about putting it in the mail, but decided to make the long trek – about a half of a mile – to Kaiden's house so he could maybe see his friend's face after we left it on the porch for him," Nichols continued.

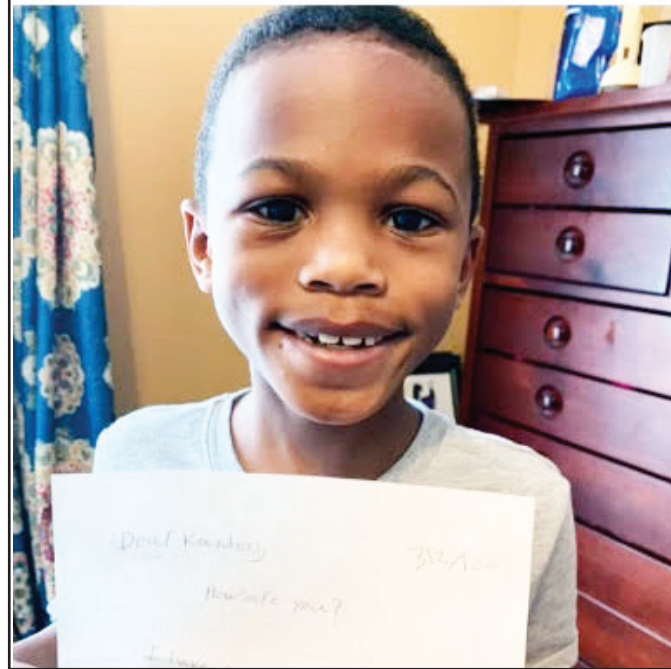
"We all waited in the car and I reminded Sam to knock on the door but then run back to the car," she said.

For Kaiden, his mother said, "It had been pretty drab not being able to go to school and see his friends. After receiving Samson's letter Kaiden wanted to go online and look up the animals that Samson wrote about. This prompted my son to look up a tarantula hawk on Google.

The ordinarily shy 7-year-old, Kaiden who enjoys being with friends and laughing, proudly posed for a photo with the letter he received from Samson.

"Samson is one of Kaiden's best buddies," Davis said.

For Samson, also 7, he was determined to make the most of a cloudy day. "I could tell it lifted Samson's spirits to get



**Top: Samson on his way to drop the note for Kaiden. (Bottom left): Kaiden proudly shows the letter Samson dropped off. (Bottom right): Samson rang the bell and dropped the note and ran so he could be 6 feet away for social distancing. They smiled and waved to each other before Samson ran back to his mom's car. Courtesy Photo**

to see his friend and do something to make someone else's day better," Nichols stated.

The two met a year ago in first grade, and while they were placed in separate classes this year, Kaiden and Samson were still able to see each other regularly at school.

"Whenever I asked Samson who he

would like to see, or what the highlight of his day was, he always mentioned seeing Kaiden at recess," Nichols said.

"Sam says that Kaiden is a truly kind friend, and I can tell that Samson appreciates Kaiden always being kind and thoughtful in a world where not everyone is kind," she said.

Davis said Samson's kind gesture

helped to not only brighten Kaiden's day but hers as well.

"For me, it made my day to see Kaiden so happy to receive a letter," Davis said.

"It also reminded me that in dark times, there is always light. I appreciated it so much and was thankful for Samson's mom to assist him with the delivery."

# Neighbors Network formed to help mental health community during pandemic

By Stacy M. Brown

As the novel coronavirus continues to wreak havoc on the nation, the mental health community isn't being forgotten.

Baltimore Councilmembers Zeke Cohen, Kristerfer Burnett and a coalition of community organizations have launched the Baltimore Neighbors Network (BNN), which is designed to respond to what the group called a looming mental health crisis caused by the disease.

The network, which hopes to reach as many as 85,000 community members over the next six months, will enlist neighbor volunteers, mental-health ambassadors, and pro bono clinicians to address the epidemic of loneliness and isolation created by COVID-19.

"The Baltimore Neighbors Network really grew out of conversations that were being had with several of our community partners, but started with the Mental Health Association of Maryland, Pro Bono Counseling, the Baltimore City Office on Aging and my office," Cohen said in an interview with the Baltimore Times.

"Through my work on the Elijah Cummings Healing City Act over the past few years, I've been actively having conversations with Baltimoreans about the trauma that they experience," Cohen said. "And, when the pandemic started, I immediately recognized that this was going to impact our community not just physically, but mentally as well. Together, with nearly 20 other organizations, we began to build what is now the Baltimore Neighbors Network."

To help those with mental health concerns, volunteers will make calls to offer support, assess wellbeing, and create critical connections. Neighbors will then be invited to join the Neighbors Network, creating a peer-to-peer system of support. Those that require additional services will be connected to mental health ambassadors and pro bono clinicians, according to Cohen's office.



*Zeke Cohen*  
*Baltimore City Councilmember*  
Courtesy Photo

"Our goal is for individuals to make proactive phone calls to check on isolated and senior members in their community. Those who wish to volunteer to make phone calls are vetted through an initial background check," Cohen said. "They then participate in about five hours of training on harm-reduction and inclusive listening, script and technical training. Once on-boarding has been completed, volunteers will be assigned to make ten pre-assigned points of contact per week, totaling approximately 2.5 hours."

During those calls, volunteers will field responses to determine what additional services, resources, or check-ins their contacts might need.

The calls will be proactive outreach to check-in on those most isolated and vulnerable in our community, Cohen added.

Also, Pro Bono Counseling Project clinicians will volunteer time and skills to assist individuals with mid to high levels of behavioral health needs via telehealth.

The clinicians are licensed and insured and have been vetted. Social work students, as well as health and human service professionals, will be able to volunteer at levels appropriate to their experience, expertise and interest.

"During what is arguably the most challenging period in our lifetime, it is more important than ever for Baltimoreans to unite. We face a deadly virus that threatens to tear us apart. In this moment of crisis, we will not turn our backs on our most vulnerable residents." Cohen said.

# April is Testicular Cancer Awareness Month

Washington, D.C.— Men's Health Network (MHN) joins with other health organizations to raise awareness of testicular cancer during Testicular Cancer Awareness Month (April). These organizations are calling on greater awareness among men, healthcare providers, and communities about this cancer that can attack boys and men of all ages.

Although testicular cancer accounts for about 1 percent of all male cancers, it is the most common form of cancer among men between 15 and 35 years old. It has one of the highest survival rates, if found early. Therefore, overall awareness is critically important. This year alone, in the U.S., more than 9,000 men will be diagnosed with testicular cancer, according to the American Cancer Society. Over 400 deaths will occur this year due to the disease.

Ana Tomsic, MPH, CHES, VP of Men's Health Network, emphasizes the importance of early detection and education, saying, "The earlier, the better. If we are able to provide resources and education to that younger population, and reduce the stigma surrounding testicular cancer, we will be able to empower men to take charge of their health and know that when something seems wrong or off, they need to get it checked out."

Olympic gold medalist and World Champion figure skater, Scott Hamilton, is a survivor of testicular cancer. He too, says that early detection is key. "I knew something was different and didn't do anything, for a long time. By the time I found out why, I was Stage 3 (out of 4). Know your body. You know your body.

Self-examination is easy, and takes very little time. Getting to cancer early is still the best way to survive."

"Testicular cancer is not considered to be preventable," said Dr. Salvatore Giorgianni, Jr., PharmD, Senior Science Advisor for Men's Health Network. "As with so many serious conditions, treatment of early-detected testicular cancer is associated with favorable outcomes. It is our belief, therefore, that men be encouraged by their primary care providers and health policy makers to learn about testicular cancer, the benefits of early detection and treatment, and to adopt periodic detection techniques including frequent testicular self-examination."

By highlighting Testicular Cancer Awareness Month, we hope to stress the importance of health education and awareness. Men's Health Network believes that creating a discussion around testicular cancer, self-examinations, and treatment is a great way to bring awareness to your community.

The TesticularCancerAwareness-Month.com website helps educate people about risk factors, warning signs, and treatment options for the disease. The site offers videos, a social media toolkit, downloadable posters, brochures, research articles, and examples of awareness activities to turn a difficult-to-discuss problem into an interactive and easier-to-approach learning experience.

For more information on MHN's ongoing Dialogue on Men's Health series, visit: [www.DialogueOnMen'sHealth.com](http://www.DialogueOnMen'sHealth.com).

*Stay up-to-date on positive news in the community!*  
*Sign up for The Baltimore Times weekly newsletter at*  
<https://bit.ly/2E5NuM5>

## 2020 Grateful American Book Prize

The Grateful American Book Prize is now accepting submissions. The award is given each year to authors who have created outstanding works of historical fiction, or non-fiction, for seventh to ninth graders. Books published between August 1, 2019 and July 31, 2020 are eligible. The winner will receive \$13,000; two additional authors will get "Honorable Mention" acknowledgements of \$500 each. For more information, visit the website: [www.gratefulamericanbookprize.com](http://www.gratefulamericanbookprize.com).

# Rambling Rose

*The Coronavirus pandemic  
has shut us down*



*Rosa Pryor Trusty*

Hello everyone, I truly hope you and your family are well. This is a terrible situation. Yes, this terrible and scary that COVID-19 has shut all of our entertainment down. No more daytime parties with our DJs; no more concerts; jazz shows; cabarets or social events of any kind.

There are no churches or casinos to go to relax our nerves. We can't bury our loved ones or have a wedding. But ladies and gentlemen, take my word for it—this too shall pass. In the meantime we must follow the rules.

I must say, as an entertainment writer/columnist this is out of my lane. You know me, if it doesn't sing, dance or play an instrument, I am lost.

To all my readers and fans of "Rambling Rose," please stay home. If you have to go out, protect yourself with gloves and a mask. We have been hearing a lot of things from the news and they say the symptoms show up as respiratory issues—fever, cough, shortness of breath and breathing difficulties and in more severe cases pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome, kidney failure and even death. So please be safe, take care of yourself and try to stay healthy.

It seems that some of the preventive measures you can take are: regular hand washing; covering your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing; thoroughly cooking any meat/eggs; and avoiding contact with anyone who shows symptoms of respiratory illnesses such as coughing or sneezing.

Some of my musicians have found a way to still entertain us by going on Facebook Live and performing in their homes. Some DJ's are spinning your favorite records from their own private studios. I think this is wonderful and I

am very happy about that. I am worried though, about my readers who don't have the technology—computers or smart phones—to see this. So my suggestion to them is to turn on your television and find the channels that offer music shows just for you.

Well, my dear friends, be safe, stay home and pray this mess will be over soon. I am still laughing at Ms Maybelle's homemade coronavirus-free, supermarket mask.

Remember if you need me, call me at 410-833-9474 or email me at [rosapryor@aol.com](mailto:rosapryor@aol.com). **UNTIL THE NEXT TIME, I'M MUSICALLY YOURS.**



— DJ Christopher "Sugar Chris" Tittle found a way to continue to entertain us during this Cronavirus Pandemic. He will be live for "Happy Hour Party Mix Live" on Facebook on Fridays from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m.



*Lexington Market Entertainment Director Kimberly "Kim Cummings" overlooking the new on-going renovations of Lexington Market. There will be many changes including the relocation of the entertainment arcade.*



*Kelly Carter, owner of the popular restaurant called Grind & Wine in Randallstown; her partners and Isaiah from her Junior Culinary team help her with what God said to do—help others. Carter had the ultimate pleasure of serving hot to-go breakfast to families in the community—especially the children. A majority of the students receive meal assistance during the week but not weekends.*



*My crazy, crazy, adopted daughter and Baltimore comedian and community advocate, Pamela Leak, known as Ms' Maybelle" announced that she has some homemade all-in-one supermarket Corona-Free Asthma Prevention Eastside masks for sale. "She probably made herself!" She says, "Bmore I got this!" She is so damn funny!*

# Ravens brass prepare to deal with virtual experience

By Tyler Hamilton

The Baltimore Ravens have developed a tradition of winning over the years. A large part of their success has come because of their ability to hit on NFL Draft picks. The Ravens aim to continue their draft wizardry. However, it will be different this year because the draft will be a virtual experience due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

Ravens head coach John Harbaugh will be one of the many shot callers across the league now required to handle business from their homes instead of the team's war room. The race is now on to build an efficient and secure means to communicate in the new virtual environment.

The need for a secure network extends to playbooks being distributed to players and virtual meetings. Harbaugh isn't a fan of the new way of doing things.

"It's a big concern. Hopefully, we'll be okay," Harbaugh said via his pre-draft press conference. "I really wouldn't want the opposing coaches to have our playbook or our draft meetings. That would be preferable if we can stay away from that."

Harbaugh pointed out when a company faces a security breach where personal customer information is stolen. Now the Ravens' tech support team becomes a more important part of the team.



*The Baltimore Ravens management are preparing for this year's virtual NFL Draft due to the coronavirus pandemic. (Above) Former Ravens General Manager Ozzie Newsome and Baltimore Ravens General Manager Eric DeCosta*  
Courtesy Photo/BaltimoreRavens.com

Ravens General Manager Eric DeCosta doesn't have the same concerns. He even joked about it.

"I have more confidence in Zoom than I do in Ozzie [Newsome], John, Steve [Bisciotti], and Dick [Cass], with a copy of our draft board that they just leave in the car on their front seat or something like that," DeCosta joked.

Precautionary measures for the Coronavirus caused prospect pro days to be

canceled along with team visits. Measurables are not as much of a variable in the draft evaluation process this year. Teams aren't able to get their hands on players during private workouts.

That pushes teams to focus more on the actual game film. Traditional NFL evaluators like the Ravens hold an advantage because the film is what they always placed the most emphasis on.

"I don't think our draft preparation is really going to be that much different from what we've been accustomed to," DeCosta said via the team site. "It's going to be old school. It's like the 80s have come back and we're just going to sit here and watch tape."

Prospects that would have been at local pro days at the team facility won't have the opportunity to showcase their talent in front of team personnel. There are a number of prospects that help set themselves up for an un-drafted free agent contract after catching an evaluator's eye during team workouts.

The Ravens are not strangers to leaving stones unturned. One of their best finds was kicker Justin Tucker who was recently named to the 2010 All-Decade team. They don't seem concerned about being unable to spend as much pre-draft time with prospects to mine gems in the draft.

Ravens Director of Player Personnel Joe Hortiz thinks they'll be fine.

"Historically we've done a good job with the guys that aren't invited to the Combine and non-all star guys," Hortiz told the Ravens site. "Our scouts do a great job of getting the information from their sources at the schools—the trainers, the strength coaches. So, we have a lot of estimated 40 [-yard dash] times. Our analytics crew can help us with that as well. They do a great job of getting information, so I think we can get the information necessary.

"They're in HBCU's, they're in D-II's, and they're in D-III's. We have a number of guys who we've talked about over the course of this scouting season from those types of schools. So, they've been evaluated. Maybe we haven't been to their Pro Days, but again, our scouts do a great job of getting information."

## Both federal and state tax deadline changed to July 15!

Please don't waste your money on paid preparers when you can get your taxes done for free! Tax Deadline Day has now been changed to July 15, 2020 so there is no need to rush to file your taxes before April 15, 2020. If you earned \$56,000 or less in 2019, you could qualify for free tax preparation services from the nonprofit CASH Campaign of Maryland. While the CASH Campaign and their partners are on temporary hiatus due to the coronavirus, they will resume taking appointments again soon. Keep Your Money - Why waste it on paid preparers when you can get it done for free and on time for the new July 15, 2020 deadline? For more information, visit: [www.bmorefreetaxes.org](http://www.bmorefreetaxes.org) or [www.cashmd.org](http://www.cashmd.org)

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## Special enrollment for 2020 healthcare coverage for uninsured Maryland residents

In response to Maryland's State of Emergency for Coronavirus (COVID-19), Maryland Health Benefit Exchange (MHBE) has created an emergency special enrollment period for uninsured Marylanders as the concern grows for the uninsured and unemployed. The enrollment period is open now through Monday, July 15, 2020. Free help enrolling is available by phone from trained navigators, brokers and the call center for those who file their taxes before July 15, 2020 and check the box on their tax form, at: <https://www.marylandhealthconnection.gov/find-help/>.

## Comcast launches Xfinity Education Destination for kids K-12 with thousands of free resources

Philadelphia— Comcast has made nearly 2,000 hours of programming and thousands of free titles available to Xfinity video customers to give children and parents quick and easy access to educational programming by grade level as part of the company's comprehensive response to the COVID-19 crisis.

The collection is a joint effort with Common Sense Media, the leading source of entertainment and technology recommendations for families whose trusted age-based ratings and reviews are integrated into Xfinity on Demand. A subset of the education collection is also available on Xfinity Flex and across devices via the Xfinity Stream app and website.

"Today Xfinity is making thousands of hours of educational programming and resources available to our customers through Xfinity on Demand as we know how challenging it is for families right now who are suddenly homeschooling young children— many with both parents working, as well," said Rebecca Heap, SVP of Video & Entertainment at Comcast. "The programming selected in partnership with Common Sense Media is available in one comprehensive destination organized by grade level to make it as easy as possible for parents to find what is most relevant to their family."

Xfinity customers with X1 or Flex can say "Education" or, if their voice search language is set to Spanish, "Educación," into the Xfinity Voice Remote to access content available to them by grades "K-2," "3-5," "6-8," and "9-12" and also "for all ages" currently including:

- Free programs from subscription video on demand services (SVODS) Bluprint, CuriosityStream, The Great Courses Signature Collection, Grokker Yoga Fitness, HISTORY® Vault, Kids Room and The Reading Corner.

- Additional free adult continuing education programming from these SVODS focused on the "Mind," "Body," and "Soul" spanning biographies; podcasts on a range of topics including technology and business; yoga; dance; food and cooking; fitness; wellness; ballets and operas; and gardening.

- Educational series from networks and



*Xfinity video customers can say "education" into the Xfinity voice remote to access nearly 2,000 hours of programming created in partnership with Common Sense Media.*

**Photo Credit: ClipArt**

streaming services including Animal Planet, History®, Nick Jr., PBS KIDS, Smithsonian Channel and more.

- Spanish language programming available from networks including CBeebies, Discovery Familia and Kids Central.

- Firsthand interviews and historical narratives from Voices of the Civil Rights Movement, Comcast's signature commemorative programming initiative honoring the impact and legacy of the movement.

Additionally, Comcast has enlisted the guidance of Natascha Crandall, Ph.D., a psychologist and educator to program the content across English Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies based on grade appropriate guidelines aligned with the current U.S. school curriculum.

"When schools close and other community places people congregate are off limits, it can feel overwhelming for fam-

ilies with kids, so we've partnered with Xfinity to curate a list of educational recommendations to help kids learn and keep them engaged during their time indoors," said Ellen Pack, President of Common Sense.

Year round, Xfinity makes a safe and enjoyable kids and family entertainment experience a priority through a variety of features, including:

- Kids Zone, which offers a safe environment for children to browse, shuffle and watch live TV, Xfinity On Demand content and DVR recordings that are appropriate for kids ages 12 and under.

- Common Sense Media ratings and reviews, which help customers find recommendations that are right for their family.

- Xfinity xFi, the Company's simple, digital dashboard for Xfinity customers to personalize, troubleshoot, monitor,

and control their home WiFi network, offers parental control features such as pausing WiFi and bedtime mode, as well as the ability to set up 30 different screen time schedules per profile, to help families manage screen and viewing time.

Beyond free education content and resources, Comcast has undertaken a comprehensive COVID-19 response inclusive of making its low-income Internet Essentials program free for new families for the first 60 days of enrollment, opening Xfinity WiFi hotspots across the country to anyone who needs them for free (including non-Xfinity Internet subscribers), pausing data plans, creating a COVID-19 news destination on X1 and Flex (in Spanish and English), and offering rolling free entertainment previews to Xfinity X1 and Flex subscribers.

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