

## Little Hearts United Gives The Gift of Warmth: **Distributes 100 Coats To Children Impacted by Violence**



*Little Hearts United, an organization that supports children who have lost loved ones to violence held a Coat-Give-A-Way at 1400 Greenmount Avenue in Baltimore on Saturday, December 5, 2020. (Above) Santa Claus (Dick Bissell) is seated at center. To his left are Donny Moses (kneeling); Jerrod Murray; and Santa's Helper (Susan Fleshman). Pictured in the back row are Rashida Murray; Baltimore City Fire Chief Niles R. Ford; Olivia Millspaugh; Will Brown; Millie Brown; and Faith Millspaugh. (Story on page 8)*

Courtesy Photo/Little Hearts United



## Downtown Partnership launches holiday retail pop-up in Center Plaza featuring local makers

Baltimore— Downtown Partnership of Baltimore opened a pop-up retail store to help local makers increase sales and visibility during a COVID-challenged holiday gift season. The store will be open in a ground floor retail space made available by Artemis Properties on Center Plaza from noon to 8 p.m. each Wednesday through Sunday until December 23, 2020

Details about the shop are available at [www.GoDowntownBaltimore.com](http://www.GoDowntownBaltimore.com). Many of the merchants selected for the shop lack a physical retail presence of their own. By design, the shop and its location will give them high visibility in a central part of Baltimore with easy access to transit, parking, and approximately 43,000 people who live within a half-mile walking distance. Center plaza is located just off the intersection of 100 N. Charles Street at Fayette Street and will be decorated for the holidays with tree lights and a special candy cane-themed display.

“We’re encouraging everyone to support local businesses this holiday season by gifting local,” said Downtown Partnership President Shelonda Stokes. “Most retailers rely on their holiday sales to get them through the slower winter months. That will be even more important this year with limited in-store capacity due to COVID.”

Each purchase in the store will include




a reusable shopping bag. Masks are required and crowd limits and social distancing will be strictly enforced.

The list of participating merchants is being constantly updated. The partial list includes: Baltimore Bench; Chase Street Accessories and Engraving; Couples Tea; Dear Globe Coffee; Drama Mama; Hey Baltimore; Hon’s Honey; Jinji Chocolate; Magan Ruthke; Miles of Moisture; Mt. Royal Soap Company; Pangea Printing Company; Pbody Design; Raven’s Beak; Red Claw Leather; Row House 14; Son of a Hon; SuperRad Design; Tiny Dog Press; and Words with Boards.

In addition to the local merchandise, the store’s windows will showcase specially-decorated Couture Trees as part of the Lord Baltimore Hotel’s annual fundraiser. Each tree is decorated by local organizations and the public may vote on their favorite tree until December 14, 2020. In addition to the Downtown Partnership pop-up shop, the trees will also be showcased in windows at LB Bakery, 20 W. Baltimore Street, Spirits of Mt Vernon, 900 N Charles Street, and Schola, 916 N Charles Street.

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## Black Violin recently earned first Grammy nomination for 2019 album

Newark, NJ— The classical-meets-hip-hop duo Black Violin released the video for “Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas,” taken from their debut holiday album *Give Thanks*. Produced by Phil Beaudreau, the album was released in November this year.

“*Give Thanks* employs playful storytelling, whimsical strings, and hard-hitting rhythms to highlight the unifying pillars of the holiday season: Giving back to others and being wholeheartedly thankful,” Black Violin says of the full-length.

Last week, Black Violin earned their first GRAMMY nomination for *Take The Stairs* in the Best Contemporary Instrumental Album category. Released in November 2019, *Take The Stairs* was praised by **Loudwire**, **The Root**, and **Billboard**, who said the album “celebrates Black Violin’s genre-less approach to music, from the futuristic anthem ‘One Step’ to the elaborate ‘Serenade.’”

For 17 years, Black Violin has been merging string arrangements with modern beats and vocals. Members Kev Marcus and Wil Baptiste first met in orchestra class at Dillard High School in Fort Lauderdale, becoming classically trained on the violin and viola through their high school and college careers.

Post-college, they reconvened to produce beats for South Florida rappers, and began building an audience in local clubs. They later went on to win *Showtime at the Apollo* in 2005, and eventually sold out headline performances at venues across the



The Classical-meets-hip-hop duo, Black Violin released their first holiday album “Give Thanks” in November this year.

Courtesy Photo/Black Violin

country, including a sold out two-night headline run at The Kennedy Center in 2018. Their unique brand of merging the genre they were listening to (hip hop) with the world they were studying (classical) was celebrated with collaborations with Alicia Keys, Wu Tang Clan, 2 Chainz and others.

Pre-pandemic, Black Violin was playing over 200 shows a year with the goal of challenging stereotypes and preconceived notions of what a “classical musician” looks and sounds like.

“The stereotypes are always there, embedded so deep in our culture,” said Wil Baptiste. “Just by nature of our existence we challenge those ideas. It’s a unique thing that brings people together who aren’t usually in the same room, and in the current climate, it’s good to bring people together.”

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# Guest Editorials/Letters

## It's Simple— People Should Receive the Care They Need When They Need It

By *Kathlyn Wee, CEO Community Plan of Maryland UnitedHealthcare*

The need for affordable, reliable and accessible healthcare coverage is now more important than ever. State health insurance exchanges are increasingly critical given the impact of the COVID pandemic.

Hundreds of thousands of Americans have signed up for new plans in the last few months due to unemployment caused by the pandemic. For those that have lost their jobs, they shouldn't have to navigate the process of finding health coverage alone. I am reaching out on behalf of UnitedHealthcare, which recently re-entered the Maryland Health Benefit Exchange to offer insights on the impact of the pandemic on health coverage and people's health plan options.

Since mid-March, about 75,000 people have enrolled through Maryland Health Connection (MHC), the state-based health insurance marketplace, during a special enrollment period set up in response to the coronavirus public health emergency. One of every six Marylanders, receive their health coverage through MHC. Now, the MHC is open for enrollment for anyone who needs coverage through January 2021.

Unemployment insurance claims in Maryland nearly doubled as of October 3, according to data released by the Maryland Department of Labor. This increase of unemployment claims means that there are more people who lost their jobs and need health insurance options.

For many, navigating the health insurance exchange market can seem complex and confusing. It's important that the market is easy to navigate, and people are able to find plans that fit their needs, whether they are single and have grown out of their parents' plans or have a family.

It's simple— people should get the care they need when they need it. Everyone deserves affordable coverage along with expert guidance and support.

As the COVID-19 pandemic rages on, the last thing Marylanders should be worried about is health insurance to pay for preventive care or medical care they need now. We should all have plans that are affordable, easy to understand and give us access to preventative and flexible care. Please visit the Maryland Health Connection at <https://www.marylandhealthconnection.gov/> if you need coverage.

*Kathlyn Wee is the Chief Executive Officer of the UnitedHealthcare Community Plan of Maryland. Prior to this role, Kathlyn was the Senior Vice President of Business Development for Optum State Government Solutions, leading its national growth strategy for technology and business capabilities that Optum offers to states. Before joining UnitedHealth Group, she served as a staff member to the leadership of the Maryland Medicaid Agency.*

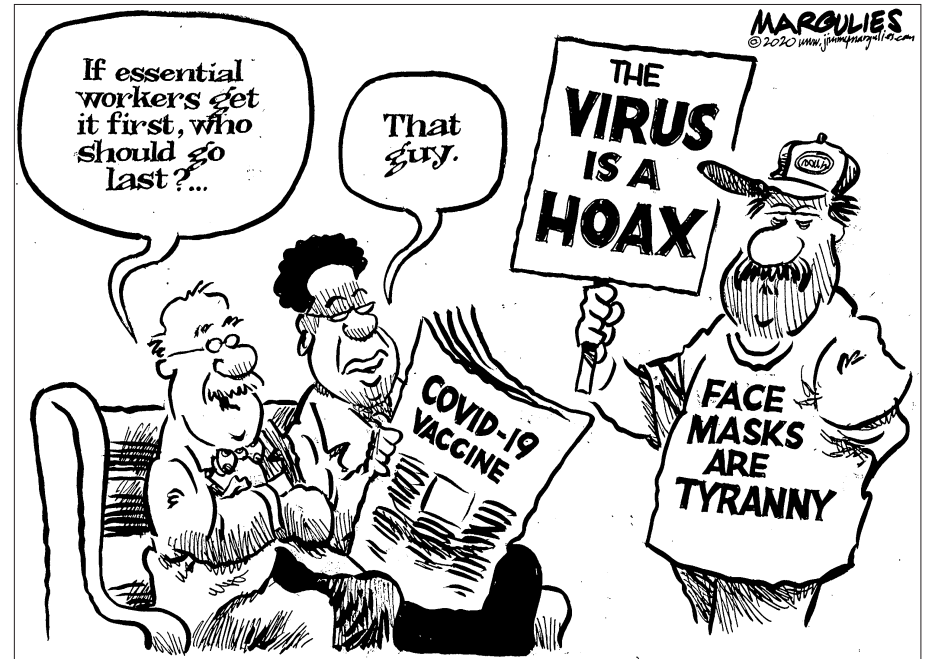
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## Letters to the Editor:

**Editor:**

**Re: Electoral College**

The debate has started again as to whether the US Constitution should be amended in order to change the presidential election process.

Some promote eliminating the Electoral College in favor of a direct popular vote for president while others believe the Electoral College should remain unchanged. Just as compromise solved the initial problems of the framers so it is that compromise can solve this problem.

The solution is to change the electoral votes to electoral points and reward each candidate a percentage of points based on the percentage of popular votes received in each state. This would eliminate the "winner take all" system thus allowing for all the votes to count.

A voter is more apt to believe their vote

counted when a percentage of popular votes are taken into account rather than the "all or nothing" system currently in existence. Further, this new system would integrate the desire for a popular vote for president with the need for the individual states to determine who actually gets elected.

For 2020 multiplying the percentage of votes each candidate received {in each state} by the number of electoral votes {in each state} results in the following: Biden 267.23 and Trump 252.33. Multiplying the percentage of popular votes each candidate received {nationwide} by the total number of electoral votes {538} results in the following: Biden 274.92 and Trump 253.40.

**Joe Bialek**

Cleveland, OH

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## Challenges Black America face with distant, virtual learning during COVID-19

By Stacy M. Brown, NNPA Newswire  
Senior National Correspondent  
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Students, teachers, parents and administrators face ever-rising challenges as the coronavirus pandemic continues to force changes in how young people receive their education.

The challenges are particularly pronounced in the African American community, where access to the Internet, working parents, and a haphazard learning model have undermined pre-pandemic gains.

Education experts have agreed that when students of color in underserved schools must go to blended or fully remote learning models, the digital divide gets broader, more profoundly affecting them.

Their school attendance plummets, along with their understanding of the curricula, their motivation to learn, and subsequently their grades.

“The digital divide again doubly impacts these students, as it completely stops our tutoring with almost all of our school partners,” said Richard Kaplan, the executive director of

IvyTutorsNetwork.com, a New York City Department of Education-approved vendor that teaches students in multiple underserved public and charter schools in the Bronx, Harlem, and Bedford Stuyvesant. “Given that the schools are struggling to pay for and provide the most basic teaching during the pandemic and, further, administrators now lack the budget for outside tutors, we have been unable to help.”

“We are no longer allowed in the classrooms for health reasons, and the students—many of them homeless—lack reliable Internet connections or suitable devices for effective remote sessions,” Kaplan remarked. “For some, fully remote actually means they might as well be in Tahiti or Timbuktu, inaccessible to effective teaching and all but forgotten.”

The distance learning scheme or the online classes method of teaching are good strategies in reducing physical contact and helps limit the spread of the virus, asserted Lewis Keegan, owner and operator of SkillsScouter.com, which aims to help potential students find their learning paths via online learning platforms.

“However, the solution might not be as inclusive, especially for people of color in other parts of the world,” Keegan observed. “This is because not everyone is privileged for such amenities. Some areas across the globe are still not introduced to the concept of the Internet.

“Aside from this, having devices such as laptops and phones for learning are not cheap and easily accessible. Because of this, more practical options are chosen by parents like spending their money in food and sustenance, rather than education.” As the pandemic shuts most people in for what promises to be a long, cold, and socially distant winter, families are suffering, offered Dr. Karen Aronian of Aronian Education Design LLC.

“Without a doubt, people of color are our most vulnerable populations. Special-needs education students in isolated rural communities, those who are homeless, and food insecure, are in dire education straits,” Aronian stated.

She noted that some reports have revealed that the pandemic has forced students to lose as much as 50 percent of their academic growth in math, at least 30 percent of ELA, and perhaps a full school year of academic growth in some cases.

“Strain, struggle, and hardship abound in communities of color, which carries over into family life and lack of hope,” Aronian continued. “Children’s education becomes secondary to the basic needs of a home and family. The traditional in-person school has been, for many children, a respite from home life, family problems, and dysfunction. Without school, education has fallen off the radar in homes where survival is first, and education is a much lower rung during COVID times.”

The pandemic has especially been tough on marginalized communities, including those with special needs, added Lisa Lightner, of A Day in Our Shoes, an organization that advocates on behalf of special education.

“I have been chatting with all kinds of families, including Black and Brown families. Here is some of what I’m seeing. The challenges that these families are facing aren’t necessarily due to their skin color— but because their skin color makes them much more likely to be in another category of marginalization,” Lightner proclaimed. “For example, lower socioeconomic status or non-Native English speakers. If assignments and instructions are not being provided in the parents’ native language, then there is much less parent participation and follow up for school and assignments.

“If a child is in a lower socioeconomic category, then they are less likely to have high-speed Internet or a device to use even to access the lessons. I know the Philadelphia School District had to get a grant to purchase tens of thousands of Chromebooks and the like.”

According to a recent Duke University panel at the school’s Samuel DuBois Cook Center on Social Equity, many Black and Brown individuals face challenges that affect their and educators’ ability to resume in-person education safely.

The panel concluded that the issue is a double-edged sword because wealth inequity also makes it harder for these communities to learn remotely.

The average Black household in North Carolina, where the panel convened, is about \$800,000 less in net worth than the average white home.

According to the Public School Forum of North Carolina, 72 percent of Black and Brown students in the state’s public schools have parents who lack secure employment, compared with 21 percent of white students.

That equates to lower-wealth households having had less access to opportunities for higher-quality education and access to post-secondary studies, education officials said.

Further, Education Week reported that in-person learning yields superior educational outcomes for primary and secondary students— and that the pitfalls of virtual instruction are especially pronounced in minority communities and those living in poverty.

School districts around the country that are strapped for cash have found it increasingly challenging to tackle the learning barriers minority students disproportionately have experienced during the pandemic.

“The reality is in many economically distressed counties, over 60 percent of families don’t have reliable Internet access, and that disproportionately affects students of color. In one of my counties, over 70 percent do not,” said Alex Beene, an adult and high school teacher in Tennessee. “And while I try to supplement those households with additional packets and materials, it’s just not the same. It’s impossible to attend daily classes and submit assignments digitally if you can’t even connect to join the conversation.

“Many families of color also lack adequate nutrition and a culture of learning in the home. When schools are closed down, not having access to school lunches or educators that motivate students to go higher academically can have lasting effects that will stretch on long after the pandemic.”

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# What physicians have to say about COVID-19 vaccinations in Black communities

By Ngoze Alia

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has reported that African Americans are disproportionately impacted and twice as likely to die from the coronavirus. In Maryland, over sixty percent of residents are Black in Baltimore and Prince George's County, and Prince George's County leads Maryland with the most known COVID-19 cases.

There has been a call for action to support minority groups that are heavily impacted by the coronavirus on local and national levels.

Earlier in the year, the COVID-19 Consortium submitted a proposal to Governor Larry Hogan addressing the health inequalities of COVID-19 in African American and Hispanic communities in Maryland. The COVID-19 Consortium is comprised six different organizations, including: Westat Incorporation; National Medical Association; National Hispanic Medical Association; National Association of Community Health Centers; The University of Maryland Center for Health Equity; and The National Black Church Initiative.

The 68-page draft of Maryland's vaccination plan prioritizes vaccinations for healthcare frontline and essential workers, and people with increased risk to COVID-19. The plan also notes that under vaccine priority groups, "current surveys indicate a high degree of vaccine hesitancy."

Vaccine hesitancy in African American populations seems to be prevalent, according to healthcare professionals.

Dr. Melvin Ego-Osuala, a pediatrician at Edge Pediatrics in Greenbelt, Md. say that even though he has not started to get



**Dr. Melvin Ego-Osuala**  
Courtesy Photo

questions or concerns about COVID-19 vaccines yet, he anticipates a heightened level of apprehension from Black parents about them for their children.

"Most parents will approach this like the flu vaccine, where it is often difficult for some parents to commit to this likely annual vaccine," said Dr. Ego-Osuala who also shared "some of my patients are pushing their vaccine schedules further along, asking more questions about routine vaccines, or simply declining routine CDC established vaccines."

Dr. Risha Irvin, a physician in the division of Infectious Diseases at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, referenced the Harris Poll/Stat Poll, which found African Americans reported that they "were less likely than white Americans to get a COVID-19 vaccination as soon as it is ready."

"I think the poll reinforces what I hear from my work in community engagement around COVID-19 vaccines," said Dr. Risha Irvin.

Research published in 2011 by the American Journal of Public Health



**Dr. Risha Irvin**  
Courtesy Photo

found that during the 2009 Swine Flu Pandemic, African Americans were less likely than Whites to receive a 2009-H1N1 vaccination. Authors of the study, Uscher-Pines, Maurer and Harris also found that both African Americans and Hispanics "were less likely than were Whites to agree that vaccines are safe in general."

When talking with physicians, distrust appears to play a huge role in reluctance towards the COVID-19 vaccination in Black communities. Dr. Irvin expressed that some African Americans "may view vaccinations as continued experimentation."

Dr. Ego-Osuala referenced the Tuskegee Syphilis Study.

When asked how these struggles can be addressed or what measures can be implemented to counteract the negative perceptions about the COVID-19 vaccination in the Black community, the medical community emphasizes communication and trust.

For Dr. Ego-Osuala, interventions should address racial disparities in

health care, which he acknowledges is still a glaring issue in the U.S. health care system.

"I've witnessed instances where two physicians of different racial backgrounds will encourage the same management plan. However, [the] patient who is African American is more inclined to listen to the Black American physician than his/her counterpart," said Dr. Ego-Osuala, who also mentioned "full transparency on the benefits and relative risks about the vaccine can curb some skepticism and encourage the Black community to become more informed about the vaccine and hopefully open to receiving COVID-19 vaccination."

Dr. Irvin shared that "we have to communicate vaccine science in ways that are effective and digestible to a large audience. We also have to address racism in medicine and health disparities head on, so that we can understand medical distrust and work on ways to improve the interaction between communities and the medical field/researchers. That means we have to invest in long term community engagement and open dialogue."

A COVID-19 Community Leadership Group of African American Faith and Community Leaders has been established at Johns Hopkins University to facilitate community education and dialogue, according to Dr. Irvin.

With recent developments and promising results from pharmaceutical companies like Pfizer, BioNTech and Moderna, an approved COVID-19 vaccination is on track to be available before the end of 2020. However, it's clear that current efforts to address the acceptance of the COVID-19 vaccination in Black communities must continue.

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# Reginald F. Lewis Museum welcomes new executive director

Baltimore— The Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History & Culture is pleased to announce the appointment of Terri Lee Freeman, former President of the National Civil Rights Museum. She will join the Museum in February 2021 as the new Executive Director. Freeman is a national leader who brings an entire career in philanthropy, focused on fundraising and building strategic alliances.

Freeman returns to Maryland after her six-year tenure at the National Civil Rights Museum where she placed her emphasis on building the organization's reputation as the new public square, a place where people from across the globe would gather to discuss and protest difficult issues, celebrate triumphs of the movement and honor Dr. King and his legacy. While stewarding the integrity of the museum's historic content, Freeman expanded the public programming to increasingly focus on contemporary civil and human rights issues such as criminal justice,



*Terri Lee Freeman*  
Courtesy Photo/RFL Museum

education, and basic human rights for marginalized populations.

A significant achievement was the museum's 18-month commemoration of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. culminating on April 4, 2018, the multi-day international MLK50

event included those who marched and worked with Dr. King as well as the new movement makers who are creating change today.

In furthering the goal of providing a safe space for difficult conversations, Freeman created "Unpacking Racism for Action," a seven-month long dialogue program to go deep into issues of implicit bias and structural racism. Through her collaborative approach to the work, she has significantly increased public engagement with the Museum.

"We launched a nationwide search to find someone with the depth of knowledge that Terri brings to the table," said Board Chair Drew Hawkins. "Her longstanding passion for bridging communities, and her clear understanding of the Museum's history, as well as our vision for the future, makes Terri a great leader for the Lewis Museum.

Prior to joining the National Civil Rights Museum, Freeman served as the president of the Community Foundation for the National Capital Region, the

largest funder of nonprofit organizations in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area. In that position, she distinguished herself for her community building, her role in creating community consensus, her leadership on critical issues to improve quality of life, and her record of increasing the Community Foundation's assets from \$52 million to more than \$350 million.

A graduate of the 2016 class of Leadership Memphis, Freeman currently serves as chair of the board of the Community Foundation for Greater Memphis, and is a member of the boards of the Greater Memphis Chamber of Commerce, the Memphis Brand Initiative, the Orpheum Theatre Group, Urban Teachers and the Southeastern Council of Foundations. In 2019, she was named a Superwoman of Business and a member of the Power 100 by the Memphis Business Journal and most recently, she was named 2020 Memphian of the Year by Memphis Magazine.

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# Little Hearts United Gives The Gift of Warmth: Distributes 100 Coats to Children Impacted by Violence

By Ursula V. Battle

Millie Brown reflected on the conversation she had with seven-year-old Jerrod Murray, a youngster she describes as being ‘the face behind’ her newly-formed organization Little Hearts United. The organization supports children who have lost loved ones to violence.

“I told Jerrod my name and we started talking,” recalled Brown. “He asked if I knew his twin brothers had been killed. He also told me his father and cousin had been killed. It broke my heart. I prayed and asked God what He wanted me to do. I also talked with my son, who said that I needed to ‘get those little hearts together.’ That’s how we came up with the name.”

On Saturday, December 5, 2020, Brown was joined by Niles R. Ford, Ph.D., Chief of The Baltimore City Fire Department; Baltimore City Police spokesman Donny Moses; and even ‘Santa Claus’ for Little Hearts United’s Coat Give-A-Way at 1400 Greenmount Avenue.

According to Brown, more than 100 new coats were distributed. She said the giveaway was made possible thanks to the efforts of many, including WBAL Radio, who has teamed up with Burlington for the past eight years as part of its Coats for Kids campaign.

“The event was amazing,” said Brown. “It was nice to give the children a coat and put a smile on their faces. It lets them know there are people in addition to their family and friends who love and care about them.”

The giveaway was preceded by a registration event on Saturday, November 21, 2020 at Giant on E. 33<sup>rd</sup> Street.

“We gave coats to those who registered along with people who were not registered,” said Brown. “People were pulling up in cars and saying their children needed coats. Miss Millie just couldn’t say ‘no.’ They were so grateful and thankful. I saw it in their eyes, and it touched my heart.”

Brown is also the founder of A Mother’s Cry, a local organization that supports mothers who have lost children



to violence. She talked about Faith Millspaugh, who serves on the organization’s Board of Directors.

“We have had 300 people killed this year, which has left many children behind,” said Brown.

I talked to Faith and told her I also wanted to help children impacted by violence. She told me, ‘Miss Millie you can do it.’ Faith has stuck with me and has been such a blessing.”

Millspaugh also shared ‘heart-felt’ sentiments for Brown.

“I met Millie and was so inspired by what she does,” said Millspaugh who also donated heart-shaped cookies for the event. “I believe Baltimore is a wonderful city, but like other cities, has big problems. We need to support our children.”

Millspaugh distributed coats at the event along with her daughter, Olivia.

“We are waiting on 501c3 status,” she said. “It’s all about organizing this organization for ongoing success. Millie Brown and these children stole my heart.”

Chick-fil-A sponsored the food. Brown’s son Will Brown gave out free prints at the event and presented portraits to two mothers who lost their sons to violence. Sponsors also included, the Baltimore City Fire Department, who donated gloves and other items.



*(Top left) Supporters of Little Hearts United handed out children’s identification kits and insurance information at the event. (Top right) Tynette Robinson holds a portrait of her son Devonte Robinson who was killed in 2019. She is pictured with artist Will Brown. (Above) Olivia Millspaugh distributes coats to a family. Courtesy Photos/Little Hearts United*

“My Chief of Staff, Amy Beth Leasure came into contact with Millie Brown and wanted to figure out a way to have the Fire Department participate in some way with her organization,” said Chief Ford. “Considering the fact that the Baltimore City Fire Department are often on scenes where a lot of these children’s parents wind up losing their lives to violence, this is a good fit for us.

The Fire Department is called fire service and from my perspective, service moves beyond fire and EMS calls. We can make a difference in people’s lives.”

“It is fantastic to see the kids receive coats and love from the community. You can’t see their mouths because of the masks, but you can see their eyes smile.”

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



## Covered By Christ Who Cared

# The Singing Sensations Youth Choir To Hold Virtual Concert

By Ursula V. Battle

For 17 years, The Singing Sensations Youth Choir has been raising money for its scholarship fund through its annual Christmas concert. Last year, the festive event drew an estimated 1400 attendees. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the choir will not be able to hold its popular concert in traditional fashion.

But the show will go on—virtually that is.

On Saturday, December 19, 2020 at 7 p.m., the choir will present the “Annual Holiday Virtual Concert.” The theme of the concert is “Covered By Christ Who Cared,” and will consist of four segments titled, *Christmas at Home, A Traditional Christmas, A Classical Christmas, and A Gospel Christmas.*

The pre-recorded concert will air via YouTube and Zoom.

Dr. Hollie Hood-Mincey is the Founder and Director of the Choir, which is comprised of students ranging from ages five to 18.

“Usually, we have 80 kids performing and in concert, but this year we have 25,” said Dr. Hood-Mincey. “We only had 25 to return due to financial difficulties of their parents along with COVID concerns. We did the recording, because we did not know where things would stand in December as it related to COVID restrictions.

“The kids are still talented, and still want to sing. They sound wonderful, and people can hear them by supporting this concert.”

According to Dr. Hood-Mincey, support for a virtual concert in comparison to a live concert presents a challenge.

“Because the concert is virtual, some have no idea of how to go online and purchase tickets,” she said. “Others are apprehensive about using their credit cards online. It is a big issue, and we are trying to figure out the best way for



*The Singing Sensations Youth Choir will present the “Annual Holiday Virtual Concert” with the theme “Covered By Christ Who Cared,” on Saturday, December 19, 2020 at 7 p.m. Tickets for the concert are available at the Eventbrite link <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/128694531809?aff=efbneb>. (Above) The Singing Sensations Youth Choir along with founder and director, Dr. Hollie Hood-Mincey (center). Courtesy Photo/Singing Sensations Youth Choir*

people who normally attend our concerts, to have access. Right now, we have about 100 people registered, and our goal was 2,000. Minimally, we hope to have at least 1,000 people to support the concert.

“We typically pack our concerts out each year. Right now, we are just trying to stay alive.”

The Singing Sensations Youth Choir is a 501c3 is a nonprofit organization. Dr. Hood-Mincey founded the choir with the expectation of exposing youth in the Baltimore Metropolitan area to the diverse and multifaceted aspects of the performing arts.

Their repertoire consists of choral, patriotic, pop music, spirituals, showtunes, children and freedom songs, Motown, and songs in different languages. The organization exposes

youth to other people, cultures, and musical experiences in Maryland and throughout the country.

Dr. Hood-Mincey noted that the choir’s planned trip to Australia this year, along with spring break concerts, and other events were all cancelled due to the pandemic.

“We have been able to bless and sponsor children for 17 years, with scholarships and sponsorships of at least \$500,000,” she said. “We do not want the pandemic to shut us down from a work and mission that is so needed in our communities.”

The cost of the concert is \$10. Donations can be made via PayPal (SSYC410@gmail.com) or Cash App (\$ssyc410).

“Even as we sing with masks and shields and we are six feet apart, this

group of brave and talented singers sound full, balanced and age appropriate,” she said. “I am thankful for all our students and their attitudes, who continue to stay safe but take the lemons and make a delicious, sweet lemonade.”

Dr. Hood-Mincey is encouraging individuals, churches, and organizations to support the event by purchasing tickets and sharing the Eventbrite link <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/128694531809?aff=efbneb>.

“The best-case scenario is for people to put the link somewhere where people can see it,” said Dr. Hood-Mincey. “While the program is virtual, it’s still a wonderful program and everyone did a wonderful job. This is a nice Saturday before Christmas event.”

For more information call Dr. Hood-Mincey at 443-622-4994.

*“The earth has grown old with its burden of care, but at Christmas it always is young, the heart of the jewel burns lustrous and fair, and its soul full of music breaks the air, when the song of angels is sung.” —Phillips Brooks*



# What black men need to know about prostate cancer

By Benjamin H. Lowentritt, M.D.

In the United States, an estimated 191,930 new cases of prostate cancer will be diagnosed and 33,330 men will die from the disease this year<sup>1</sup>. Notably, African American men have the highest prostate cancer incidence rate of any racial or ethnic group in the world<sup>2</sup>. In fact, the incidence of prostate cancer is about 60 percent higher in Black men than Caucasian men for reasons that remain unclear<sup>3</sup>. While scientists are trying to better understand the biological reasons behind why prostate cancer disproportionately affects Black men, promising new research may offer hope for thousands of African American men in the advanced stage of the disease.

The secret may lie in a man's own cells. Treatment with immunotherapy has become an important tool in the fight against advanced prostate cancer.

While oral treatments work to inhibit testosterone, immunotherapy boosts the body's natural defense and involves harvesting a man's immune cells and training them to recognize and destroy prostate cancer cells more effectively.

Recent findings published online showed that immunotherapy may help African American men with advanced prostate cancer live longer when compared to Caucasian men.

Researchers compared overall survival rates in African American and Caucasian men who had similar prostate-specific antigen (PSA) levels and received immunotherapy treatment after their prostate cancer had spread to other parts of the body. They found that African American men lived 4.5 years compared with 2.8 years for Caucasian men—an improvement of more than 20 months and a nearly 50 percent



**In Baltimore, where more than 60 percent of residents are Black or African American, it is critical for people to understand the importance of screening and early detection and be educated about treatment options for prostate cancer.**

Photo Credit: ClipArt.com

reduction in the risk of death<sup>4</sup>.

Immunotherapy is generally well tolerated, but it's not without risks. Common side effects include chills, fatigue, fever, back pain, nausea, joint ache and headache. These are not all the possible side effects associated with this treatment; more serious reactions can include acute infusion reactions, thromboembolic events and vascular disorders.

In Baltimore, where more than 60 percent of residents are Black or African American<sup>5</sup>, it is critical for people to understand the importance of screening and early detection and be educated about treatment options for prostate cancer. As a urologist, I believe that early detection is the best defense against prostate cancer. Routine screening involves a simple exam and a blood test to monitor PSA. Men in their

40s should start to discuss this with their primary care provider, as individual factors, such as family history and race can influence when and how often screening should occur. The good news is that prostate cancer is slow growing, and it is highly curable when found in the early stages<sup>6</sup>.

For men living with prostate cancer and their caregivers, I suggest the following tips that can be helpful when navigating the cancer journey:

**Seek Expert Care:** When PSA levels start to rise, seek a referral to an advanced prostate cancer specialist or clinic, which can offer a full range of services to help coordinate many different aspects of a patient's care.

**Attend Appointments Together:** Appointments can be overwhelming for men with prostate cancer. Having a caregiver attend doctor's visits can be

just as important as finding the right medical care. Caregivers can listen from another perspective, ask questions and take notes.

**Get Informed:** There isn't a "one-size-fits-all" treatment approach when it comes to prostate cancer, and a number of new treatments (e.g., anti-androgen therapy, radiopharmaceuticals, chemotherapy and immunotherapy) have changed how men with advanced prostate cancer are treated. It's crucial to do your research, learn about the different treatment options and discuss your treatment approach with your doctor.

*Benjamin Lowentritt, M.D., is medical director of the Prostate Cancer Care Program at Chesapeake Urology in the greater Baltimore area. For more information about prostate cancer, visit <https://www.chesapeakeurology.com/>.*

## Citations:

<sup>1</sup> ACS. Cancer Facts & Figures. [LINK](#)

<sup>2</sup> JNCI: Journal of the National Cancer Institute, Volume 89, Issue 3, 5 February 1997, Pages 188–189. [LINK](#).

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<sup>4</sup> Sartor O, Armstrong AJ, Ahaghotu C, et al. Survival of African-American and Caucasian men after sipuleucel-T immunotherapy: outcomes from the PROCEED registry. *Prostate Cancer Prostatic Dis.* 2020;23:517-526. [LINK](#)

<sup>5</sup> US Census. [LINK](#)

<sup>6</sup> Cancer.net. Prostate Cancer: Statistics. [LINK](#)

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# 'Tis the season to give back to aging adults in our community

Baltimore— At a time when it may be more important than ever, Home Instead's® seasonal favorite "Be A Santa to a Senior" returns stronger than ever with new options for community participation.

Program coordinators evaluated the important holiday program and made adjustments with the safety of donors, seniors and volunteers in mind. With Baltimore area seniors more isolated than ever because of concerns due to the virus, this year, for the first time in the program's 17-year history, Home Instead is teaming up with Amazon Business, to create a contactless gift-giving experience for volunteers and recipients. The new Amazon Business collaboration will provide the same holiday cheer to local seniors while also prioritizing the safety and wellness of all who are involved.

"The *Be a Santa to a Senior* program brings so much joy to seniors in our community," said Nick Konstant, owner of the Arnold Home Instead office. "Seniors are especially at risk for the feelings of isolation that we've all felt at some point during the pandemic, and a simple gift can show them that they have been thought of, which is more important this year than ever."

*Be a Santa to a Senior* relies on the generous support of the Baltimore area communities and volunteers, as well as area businesses, nonprofit organizations, and



retailers. This year Home Instead has partnered with several agencies to identify seniors in need.

It's easy to help. Members of the community can visit [BeASantatoaSenior.com](http://BeASantatoaSenior.com) and enter their zip code to view Wish Lists for local seniors on Amazon Business now through December 14. A personalized greeting

can be included with the gift, which will be shipped directly to the senior or to Home Instead where it will be safely delivered to the senior.

In addition, there are some trees in retail locations across the area decorated with ornaments featuring seniors' first names and gift suggestions. Holiday shoppers can choose an ornament, buy the requested gift and return it unwrapped to the store with the ornament attached. Tree locations in the Baltimore area can also be found by entering a zip code at [BeASantatoaSenior.com](http://BeASantatoaSenior.com).

"We need the community's help more than ever to make sure seniors feel connected this year," said Konstant. "This year we knew we had to find a way to spread holiday cheer to seniors, and we are grateful for the community's participation."

Since the program's creation in 2003, *Be a Santa to a Senior*® has provided approximately 2.1 million gifts and with the help of more than 75,000 volunteers, brightened the season for more than 750,000 deserving seniors nationwide. With adjustments, Home Instead will be able to continue the annual gift-giving program while following social distancing and safety precautions during COVID-19.

For more information about the program, visit [BeASantatoaSenior.com](http://BeASantatoaSenior.com).



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## Black-owned greeting card brand, 'Culture Greetings,' now offers same-day pickup at Walgreens

Atlanta— Culture Greetings, a woman-led and Black-owned greeting card company, announces the launch of a new print-to-store integration partnership with Walgreens. Through the technology integration with the Walgreens Photo Prints and Store Locator APIs, in addition to the Culture Greetings' mail-to-recipient delivery option, customers will now have the choice to pick up their customized printed greeting cards in any of the 9,277 Walgreens or Duane Reed locations in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

"The launching of this new partnership and integration reflects a significant first for the Walgreens API team," said Andrew Schweinfurth, Manager, Walgreens Developer Relations. "As we welcome Culture Greetings and founder Dr. Dionne Mahaffey, we acknowledge that she is the first African American female founder to join the platform."

Founded in 2018, Culture Greetings offers more than 2000 greeting cards featuring imagery centered around and elevating the Black and Brown communities' voices. Card options span all mainstream and cultural holidays and occasions, life milestones, social justice, LGBTQ+, and photo-card templates for customized personal greetings.

"We are excited to be a part of the Walgreens Developer Program," explains Dr. Dionne Mahaffey, Culture Greetings founder. "As we approach our two-year anniversary, this new integration marks a significant milestone for us, expanding the greeting card aisle, bringing more inclusive options and providing customers with the instant gratification of picking up their customized card within minutes of creating it."



*Founded in 2018, Culture Greetings offers more than 2000 greeting cards featuring imagery centered around and elevating the Black and Brown communities' voices. Card options span all mainstream and cultural holidays and occasions, life milestones, social justice, LGBTQ+, and photo-card templates for customized personal greetings.*

Courtesy Photos/Culture Greetings

Culture Greetings will continue to offer their flagship delivery method of mailing cards directly to the customer's recipient. On the website, customers can choose a greeting card, write a personal note using handwriting fonts that mirror real penmanship and click "send," which cues their state-of-the-art printing press. Gift cards from Target, Amazon, iTunes and other brands can also be included in the mailing. The company then prints and mails the card directly to the recipient's address the following business day, saving customers a trip to the store.

Culture Greetings is a Black-owned greeting card brand. Customers pick a

card online and write a note inside using handwriting fonts that mirror real penmanship. Through innovative technology, Culture Greetings will print, stamp and mail the cards directly to the

recipient. The platform now offers same-day pickup in partnership with Walgreens in-store photo prints.

For more information, visit: <https://CultureGreetings.com>

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## Ravens Lamar Jackson triumphantly returns from COVID-Reserve list

By Tyler Hamilton

The Baltimore Ravens have endured one of the NFL's worst Covid-19 outbreaks this season over the past couple of weeks. A total of 22 players have been placed on the COVID-Reserve list during the outbreak. The Ravens were without quarterback Lamar Jackson in their 19-14 loss to the Pittsburgh Steelers last week.

Jackson returned to the lineup for Tuesday's victory over the Dallas Cowboys and brought back some of his exciting ways.

Jackson exploded for a 37-yard touchdown run and finished with 94 rushing yards on the day. He also found Miles Boykin for a 38-yard touchdown before connecting with Marquise Brown for a 20-yard scoring strike.

The dynamic quarterback was excited to be back in the lineup.

"It felt like I didn't play [for] a whole season. I was like, 'It feels good to be back with my guys.' Even in practice, walking into the locker room and stuff, I was like, 'Man, I couldn't wait to see you, your faces.' It was like two weeks that I didn't see those guys. I couldn't wait to get out there and perform for those guys, because I know how much it would mean for us to win games—for sure," Jackson said.

Jackson explained how the symptoms that he experienced zapped him of his energy and caused him to sleep a lot. He still hasn't regained his sense of smell or taste.

Before being placed on the COVID-Reserve list, Jackson was trying to reconnect with speedy receiver Marquise Brown. The vertical part of the Baltimore Ravens passing game has been missing for most of this season. It



*Ravens quarterback Lamar Jackson*  
Courtesy Photo/Baltimore Ravens.com

had allowed teams to be more effective when trying to stop the Ravens offense.

Tuesday's game against the Cowboys provided hope that Jackson and Brown can get back on track.

Jackson's 20-yard touchdown pass to Brown was a thing of beauty. He found him in the corner of the end zone for the score.

"I feel like he did all the work. He had a route, the play broke down in the backfield, he turned up, and he just made a great catch. He got his feet down. That was all him. I'm just grateful we connected on one. We've got to keep it going," Jackson said.

As the Ravens begin to fight their way back to normalcy they can now start to get ready for a playoff run. At 8-5, they are just outside of the playoff picture with a huge game coming against the Cleveland Browns.

"We've got to take it day-by-day. We've got to keep winning games—that's it," said defensive end Derek Wolfe. "We've got to worry about Cleveland now, and that's it. That's all that matters. We've got to beat Cleveland. That's all that really matters. I'm not worried about anything else, other than beating the next team."

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