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Local Women Give Community Youth in Annapolis Two Generations of Love and Mothering



Cassandra Wilkins passed away on March 17, 2021. She mentored countless youth in Anne Arundel County. Wilkins inherited her love of community service from her parents-- Willie and Rosemary Wilkins. She represents the second generation of women in the community who invested in youth. Wilkins's sister, Ericka Wilkins, still volunteers. (See article on page 9). Courtesy Photo

Individuals with developmental disabilities further challenged during pandemic

By *Fatiha Belfakir*

What happens to individuals with developmental disabilities (IDD) when their lifestyle and support system suddenly changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic? What happens when their daily school routine was converted to remote learning sessions via google meet and zoom room? What happens when the pandemic places tremendous demands on limited resources for these individuals, their families, and for the provider system?

Most of the results, sadly, aren't good. The COVID-19 pandemic has created unprecedented and unique challenges for IDD, who were disproportionately isolated prior to the pandemic.

According to a study published on Disability and Health Journal, IDD are significantly more likely than others to die if they contract Coronavirus. COVID-19-related fatality rates among people with IDD nationally who tested positive for COVID-19 are 100 percent to 200 percent greater than the mortality rates among the general population who tested positive for COVID-19.

Rachel London, the executive director of Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council told the Baltimore Times that the council, which is an independent public policy organization, continues its efforts to advance the inclusion and to promote support and full integration of IDD into all aspects of community life.

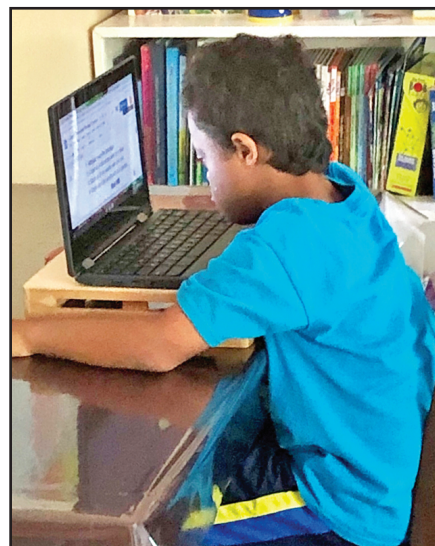
"Direct Support Professionals (DSP) play a critical role in the daily lives of the over 17,000 people with developmental disabilities who receive services and supports funded and

licensed by the Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA). Like teachers, DSPs create ways to teach people new skills. Like nurses, they provide treatments, document care. Like social workers, they get people connected to their communities. Like counselors, they listen, reflect, and offer suggestions. DSPs provide whatever support it takes so people can thrive in their communities," said London.

Kalani Brown, a mother of nine-year-old son with Down syndrome says that her son has not received any in-person support or in-person therapy since March 13, 2020. Although, he has returned to school as of March 15, 2021, his speech and occupational therapy are still conducted virtually. His social emotional goals on his Individualized Education Plan IEP were not met during virtual learning.

"My son's IEP notes that he is to have one-on-one adult support throughout the day, including scaffolding of material based on the general education curriculum. However, this was not provided," said Brown. "My son learns best by having someone model and prompt him. This has not occurred during virtual learning. I ended up providing his one-on-one support during his virtual class by creating materials and providing modifications to help him access the curriculum," added Brown.

Angie Auldridge, a mother of three, her seven-year-old son has autism, along with a rare genetic disease (SCN2A), and intellectual disability, her son has GI dysfunction, with significant challenges with focus and attention. Auldridge's son was transitioned to learning via



Navigating the virtual learning process is very challenging for students with developmental disabilities.

Courtesy Photo

Zoom, which was incredibly difficult for him since he can't attend well in person or pay attention to a screen that occasionally freezes—frustrating him further.

"In order for our son to attend online learning, my husband and I would take turns finding creative ways to keep him seated. We tried adaptive seating including a chair that allowed him to wiggle. We tried sitting behind and beside him to block him from leaving. However, keeping him seated was only half the battle," said Auldridge. "The remainder of the struggle was to try to get him to engage with the lesson, and not become distracted by the background noise from our own home, as well as his classmates' homes when they weren't on mute."

A large number of people with IDD depends on caregivers and loved ones to

help them bridge gaps in intellectual and communication abilities but many of them lost access to trained caregivers and community service providers due to the pandemic.


"For many months, my son's therapeutic services through the school system, such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, vision support, and adaptive physical education were moved to consult. So, if we needed something, we could reach out to get support, but otherwise, he was not receiving regular services," said Auldridge.

Acknowledging the struggle of IDD and their families, London said that the council advocated throughout the pandemic to ensure IDD and their families received the services and supports needed and that providers had the funding and statewide support to continue.


"Recognizing the need to remain comfortable and connected, the Council funded \$85,000 [to] alleviate the anxiety caused by social distancing and promote continued engagement with peers by providing funds to fill gaps in services that people are experiencing due to the required social distancing. The success of that project led to another \$135,000 to fund technology," said London.

While the struggle continues, many families strongly believe that IDD need more support and most importantly, they need more opportunities to be heard.

"People with IDD are extremely competent but sadly, are not treated as such. Decisions are made without their input. I think that for any improvement to occur, people with IDD, their families and caregivers must have a seat at the table," said Brown



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Guest Editorials/Commentary

Darryl Strawberry tells Black Press how everyone can make a turnaround in life

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

Just as it did when he first arrived in the major leagues 38 years ago, Darryl Strawberry's name evokes awe.

His picture-perfect left-handed swing that launched 335 home runs and drove 1,000 RBIs, remains one of baseball's all-time pleasing memories.

But even at the height of his superstardom, the South Central, Los Angeles-born athlete suffered.

"My life was fractured," Strawberry revealed in an interview with the National Newspaper Publishers Association and the Black Press of America's live morning news program, *Let It Be Known*.

"Like many who come from the inner-city who didn't have a male figure in their life—I didn't have a father—my pain led me to my greatness, but my greatness would eventually lead me to destructive behavior," the candid former slugger revealed.

Strawberry opens up even more in his new book, "Turn Your Season Around: How God Transforms Your Life."

In the book written with author Lee Weeks, Strawberry, now an evangelist, explains how individuals heading in the wrong direction can move positively.

He is candid, writing about tragedy, personal failure, and transforming injustice. Despite winning four world championships with the New York Mets and New York Yankees, Strawberry fell victim to drug addiction, spent time in prison, and battled cancer.

His co-author notes that, "Strawberry's life story is proof that you can overcome life's adversities one decision, one step at a time. It's time to turn your season around."

There were "lots of expectations about me when I first came up to the big leagues in 1983," Strawberry recalled. "I always tell young people that expectations are not who you are. The only expectations you should have are for yourself and not what others put on you."

With the sweetest of swings and five-tool talent, Strawberry faced the pressure of mounting expectations even as a teen. "I was the Black Ted Williams, the next Willie McCovey," he told the Black Press during his 25-minute interview.

"It got to a place where I had to have confidence in myself and just be myself," Strawberry continued. "You can't be anyone else. God has made each of us unique."

Because of his off-the-field challenges, Strawberry didn't make the Hall of Fame. Now, as focused and determined to help others as he's ever been, Strawberry shrugs off those who remind him of what he could have accomplished.

"I'm glad for my walk, my road," Strawberry declared. "People say, 'you could have been in the Hall of Fame,' but look at me now. I am an evangelist, and I'm encouraging people about life. It all works out as long as we don't quit."

Strawberry's new book, "Turn Your Season Around," is available at most book-sellers, including amazon.com and barnesandnoble.com.

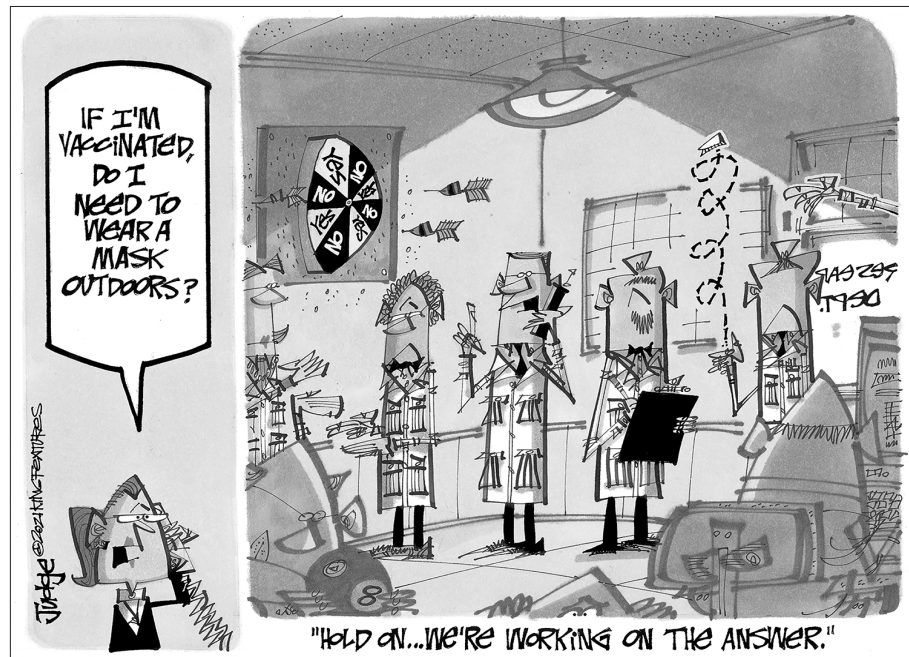
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Community Affairs

MDH launches free statewide mobile COVID-19 testing program

Baltimore— The Maryland Department of Health (MDH) today launched a free mobile COVID-19 testing program to enhance testing engagement and access in underserved communities statewide. The program comprises two mobile testing teams that will visit each of Maryland's 24 jurisdictions over the next 12 weeks.

"As we continue to vaccinate more Marylanders, we are also racing against the spread of more contagious COVID variants," said MDH Secretary Dennis R. Schrader. "Testing, along with contact tracing, are parallel efforts that remain critical to our ability to identify and respond to COVID-19 outbreaks and will enable us to end the pandemic."

As part of a larger effort to shift COVID-19 testing from large testing centers toward smaller, more community-based testing, the Maryland COVID-19 Testing Task Force is working with local health departments

to deploy the program's mobile testing teams. The program is offering PCR tests, in partnership with MAKO laboratories, with results available with 24-48 hours.

Mobile teams will begin this week in Somerset and Charles counties, visiting Somer Cove Marina, Mt. Carmel Church, the Charles County Government Building and Waldorf Jaycees. Next week, teams will visit St. Mary's, Calvert, and Worcester Counties.

"From the start of this pandemic, our goal was to make testing for COVID-19 as easy as it can be, no matter where in Maryland you live," said Jon Weinstein, director of the Maryland COVID-19 Testing Task Force. "As people increase their activity outside the home, we are evolving Maryland's COVID-19 testing strategy to meet people where they are and to better support our communities."

To find a COVID-19 testing site near you, visit the testing site locator at covidtest.maryland.gov. Mobile testing locations may be found by selecting "search Mobile Testing Sites only."

For more information about COVID-19 in Maryland visit covidLINK.maryland.gov.

Supreme Court can protect Black lives by ending qualified immunity

By David Johns, Executive Director of the National Black Justice Coalition

Last year, we witnessed another crushing blow in the fight to end police violence against Black people. Only one of the three officers involved in the murder of Breonna Taylor was charged in the case. However, they were not charged for causing her death; rather, they were indicted on charges of destroying property.

The three officers responsible for the murder of Breonna Taylor are not the first to walk free after killing an unarmed Black person, and unfortunately, especially if things continue as they are, they will not be the last. Things continuing as they are, includes the decision to only charge one Louisville police officer for the destruction of property, which sends the message that Black lives do not matter to law enforcement agencies.

In addition to the trauma associated with Black death by police officers we are repeatedly denied the time and space to mourn those that were stolen from us. We can't even get through a trial on the

killing of one unarmed Black man without the killing of another unarmed Black man. Here we are again, this time mourning the loss of Daunte Wright, who was killed by police officer Kim Potter in Minneapolis, Minnesota—the same city that has just witnessed a guilty verdict in the case of Derek Chauvin, who killed George Floyd last May. As the country awaited this verdict, Ma'Khia Bryant, a 16-year-old Black girl in Columbus, Ohio was killed by a police officer when she called them to intervene in a dispute with another teenager.

At the National Black Justice Coalition, we prioritize ending policies that put all Black lives at risk. We support the shifts in our legal practices required to honor that all of our lives matter, in theory, and in practice. For that reason, I truly believe that if we are going to have a conversation about increased police accountability; we need to start talking about the courts and qualified immunity—a defense to excessive force available to officers. Derek Chauvin may have been found guilty of George Floyd's murder, but the fact remains that this legal protection will continue to put Black people in danger at the hands of the police.

Qualified immunity is legal protection created by the Supreme Court that shields government officials from being held liable for constitutional violations—such as the right to be free from excessive police force—as long as the officials didn't violate “clearly established law.” It was invented by the Court in 1967 as a way to protect public officials who believed their actions were authorized by the law. Fifteen years later in *Harlow v. Fitzgerald*, the Court expanded the defense of qualified immunity. Instead of upholding the requirement of public officials acting in “good faith” in order to be shielded from liability, even officials who used excessive force would be

immune from being held legally accountable for their actions.

Justice Sonia Sotomayor called qualified immunity a “one-sided approach” that “transforms the doctrine into an absolute shield for law enforcement officers.” Justice Sotomayor went on to say that qualified immunity “sends an alarming signal to law enforcement officers and the public. It tells officers that they can shoot first and think later, and it tells the public that palpably unreasonable conduct will go unpunished.”

Following the direction of the Supreme court, lower courts mostly dismiss police misconduct lawsuits on grounds that there is no prior court decision with nearly identical facts. This results in seeing what happened with Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Tony McDade (a Black trans man who was murdered by a member of the Tallahassee Police Department the same week as George Floyd was murdered) and Breonna Taylor happening over and over again—police officers having full ability to fatally shoot Black people with impunity, across the country and regardless of jurisdiction. Daunte Wright's untimely murder—just like Breonna Taylor's and George Floyd's—is another example of why now is the time for a Black woman Supreme Court nominee. Only one legal entity can end the enactment of qualified immunity and remove the protection itself, and that is the United States Supreme Court. We need judges that understand what it means to have a loved one not come home because an officer perceived their skin color to be a crime punishable by death as well as how dangerous it is to tell police officers to shoot first and think later. We need judges that know what we mean when we scream, “I can't breathe.”

Simply put, qualified immunity upholds a culture of impunity where

government officials in general and police officers, in particular, are not held accountable for using excessive force and violence against unarmed individuals. Qualified immunity blocks mechanisms for holding the police accountable for their actions. Where there is no accountability, there is no justice. An outcome where only no one is changed for causing George Floyd's death would be a failure of the law; a failure that could be solved by ending qualified immunity and widening the pathways for holding law enforcement accountable for the violent harm caused to our communities.

The Supreme Court is a deliberative body and the perspective of a Black woman will ensure decisions that are more inclusive of diverse lived experiences. The failure of qualified immunity shows that we need better representation and that now more than ever, we need Supreme Court nominees who are committed to preserving justice. For the She Will Rise campaign, it is important that the next Supreme Court nominee be a Black woman who understands the danger qualified immunity presents for our nation's most vulnerable communities.

Black women are uniquely qualified to recognize who is left out of Supreme Court decisions because Black women know what it is like to be constantly excluded from the table. As Thurgood Marshall was often referred to as the conscience of the Court, a Black woman SCOTUS nominee could be poised to continue that legacy with demonstrated empathy for those with his shared experience of oppression and injustice. With this in mind, the Supreme Court has the potential to exercise its power to end this qualified immunity and finally hold police accountable so that there are no more Breonna Taylors, Daunte Wrights, or George Floyds.

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UMB Vaccination Clinic in Campus Center Opens to Anyone 16 and Older

By Jena Frick, University of Maryland, Baltimore

As healthcare workers around the world race to get the COVID-19 vaccine distributed, the University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB) has joined the effort by opening a vaccination clinic in the Southern Management Corporation (SMC) Campus Center.

The clinic is staffed by volunteers made up of UMB faculty and staff, UMB's Office of Emergency Management, as well as student volunteers from the University of Maryland School of Medicine (UMSOM), University of Maryland School of Nursing (UMSON), and University of Maryland School of Pharmacy (UMSOP).

"We know that we need to get as many people vaccinated as possible in order to get to the other side of this pandemic," said Jane M. Kirschling, PhD, RN, FAAN, the Bill and Joanne Conway Dean, UMSON. "To have our students be able to play such an essential role in this process means a great deal. Especially because we're also giving back to the community in the process, which is so important."

The clinic is open to anyone 16 and older. Those wishing to make an appointment can visit www.getthethevaccinebaltimore.org or call 410-706-3000 for assistance. Individuals under the age of 18 must be accompanied by a parent or legal guardian. The central position of the SMC Campus Center provides a convenient location for members of the West Baltimore community and beyond to get vaccinated and an opportunity for students to gain clinical experience

"To be able to vaccinate the population, we have to be able to



The University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB) Vaccination Clinic is open to provide vaccinations to Baltimore City residents, workers, and students. Register at www.GetTheVaccineBaltimore.org.

accommodate the surrounding community," said Veronica Quattrini, DNP, FNP-BC, senior director of the Doctor of Nursing Practice Program at the nursing school. "It's amazing when you see the amount of people that have been trained and are so willing to be part of this effort. It has been a really great experience to see how we all came together in this emergency situation."

Several students actually decided to give up one of their clinical rotations so they could volunteer their time at the SMC Campus Center Vaccination Clinic. Students from UMSOP work behind the scenes to prepare each dose of the vaccine while medical and nursing students administer the vaccine directly to community members. "We're here to prevent the spread of COVID, and I think the vaccine is the number one resource for people to get to protect themselves," said David Lee, nursing

student and volunteer at the vaccination clinic.

As a person over the age of 65 and higher risk to COVID-19, Baltimore

City resident Michelle Peakes signed up to get her shot as soon as she was able to get an appointment. "I believe it's a death threat for anyone who doesn't get it. I just don't want to take any chances if I don't have to" she said.

Adrian Anderson, who also received the Moderna vaccine at the SMC Campus Center clinic, lost an uncle to COVID-19 in April 2020 and her mother recently was diagnosed with COVID-19 and hospitalized. "I was initially very hesitant to get the vaccine, but as time went on, I began to realize that more people were getting sick and the numbers were not falling down," she said. "I went ahead and made a conscious decision to get the vaccine and stop the spread to protect others and my own family. COVID has been wreaking havoc on all of the world, so we all need to get this vaccine so we can protect the community as a whole."

To register for a vaccine, visit www.GetTheVaccineBaltimore.org or call 410-706-3000 for assistance.

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The 'March' Culminates Where It All Began

By Ursula V. Battle

Established in 2007, Roberta's House moved into its first professional office at 1900 N. Broadway, and has provided services to over 8,000 children and adults. Since opening, the non-profit has become the leading pioneer in addressing grief as public health prevention against violent behavior.

Even with the success of the program, Annette March-Grier pressed for more, wanting to see Roberta's House offer a larger space to accommodate its growing programs, staff, and services. March-Grier also wanted Roberta's House to accommodate a greater number of people in need of bereavement care. With those goals in mind, she began a new journey, leading the 'March' to generate \$12 million dollars through a capital campaign effort for the construction of a new building.

The ambitious fundraising drive also included members of Roberta's House board of directors, Maryland Legislative leaders, foundations, and the community. The result of their efforts came to fruition in January 2021, with the opening of the Roberta's House Bereavement Center at the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Building. The new facility is located at 928 E. North Avenue, in Baltimore, and is the first bereavement center in the nation founded by, and serving, the African American community. The state-of-the-art center includes a library resource center, multi-purpose room, theatre, art activity room, fitness room game room, expression room, conference rooms, family counseling rooms, and administrative offices.

"The vision was never this big, but as the programs continued to grow and the staff continued to grow, I felt the building we were in wasn't big enough," said March-Grier, president and co-founder of Roberta's House. "I began thinking, we need to acquire the whole block," she said, referring to the 900 block of E. North Avenue – the original location of March Funeral Homes,



The Roberta's House Bereavement Center at the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Building located at 928 E. North Ave. Photos: Ursula V. Battle



The Healing Room, a counseling space for Roberta's House's program participants or private meetings with social workers.

which later became the administrative offices.

"We needed more space for parking, programs and staff, so I went to the board of directors about acquiring the whole block. I thank The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, the Maryland General Assembly, Governor Larry Hogan, and so many others for their support in making this possible."

The 22,000 square foot building is built on the landmark of row homes at 928 E. North Avenue, where March Funeral Home was originally founded in 1957.

According to March-Grier, the expansion allows the organization

to double its support in addressing the growing concerns of urban grief and provide healing for the entire family system.

"With the new center we have the capacity to increase the number of families we serve each year... we can now help up to 300 people a week," she said. "We have been here since February, and moved completely out of the last location. We are all full of excitement and gratitude to be here. The community and volunteers have been in prayer for this project since the beginning. To see the fruition of the fruits is awesome."

While the program is in operation, the building has not yet been opened to the public due to the COVID pandemic.

"COVID forced us to quickly pivot into virtual support groups," said March-Grier. "Nothing has stopped. We have helped people to adjust to this new way of having groups now. People have adapted quite well. The biggest question people are asking is when we are opening. They can't wait to come inside. But we are being very strategic about how we are going to bring people into the space safely. We are hoping by mid-summer, but it depends on how Maryland progresses with the vaccinations and where things stand with the pandemic."

March-Grier is the daughter of William Carrington March – a former postal worker, and Julia Roberta March, founders of March Funeral Homes. Her siblings are Cynthia, Erich, and Victor, co-founders of Roberta's House, named in memory of their mother. The four along with other members of their family, operate March Funeral Homes, one of the major African-American funeral service businesses in the nation with locations in Baltimore, Prince Georges County, Washington, DC, and Richmond, Va. The family also founded King Memorial Park, the largest African-American owned and operated cemetery in the United States.

"Some of the older neighbors will ring the bell and tell us the history about the funeral home and our parents," said March-Grier. "Some will talk about my father working at the post office and others talk about March Funeral Homes handling services for their loved ones. There have been so many warm welcomes, prayers, and well-wishes. My mother was so caring and was always helping somebody out. Her spirit of love lives on along with her compassion through Roberta's House."

For more information about the Roberta's House Bereavement Center at the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Building visit www.robortashouse.org.

Local Women Give Community Youth in Annapolis Two Generations of Love and Mothering

By Andrea Blackstone

Rosemary Wilkins set the tone for her perceptive daughters—the late Cassandra Wilkins and Ericka Wilkins—to spread motherly love to youth just as she has faithfully done over the years with her husband’s support. Rosemary’s journey to call Annapolis home began around 1957. She and her husband, Willie have been married for 53 years. Before COVID-19 hit, the Wilkins’s driveway was rarely empty. The door constantly opened and shut as people of all ages walked up a few steps to ring the doorbell and receive a dose of Wilkins’ love that is rooted in Christianity.

Rosemary started working with kids in the community because she wanted to see them have a better life. The journey included 12 years as a foster parent and weekly Bible study lessons at the Wilkins’ home, often around a large dining room table. But along the way, the Wilkins family endured the unexpected loss of Cassandra.

Many in the community are currently struggling with the loss of the well-liked woman who suddenly passed away on March 17, 2021. Cassandra was in the process of becoming an ordained minister at Mt. Olive Church. To Barnes, Cassandra was like a sister and “partner in crime.” The duo experienced everything together from attending events and shopping excursions and 7 a.m. Starbuck runs.

The City of Annapolis recognized Cassandra posthumously. The Annapolitan was known for demonstrating that God’s love has no boundaries, as mentioned in the citation. Cassandra was a key organizer of the City of Annapolis’s Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Parade. She directed a youth choir. At Mount Olive Church, Cassandra could be spotted supporting youth, taking them on retreats, trips, and college tours. She gave money for scholarships and became a trusted, non-judgmental listening ear.



Cassandra Wilkins passed away on March 17, 2021. She mentored countless youth in Anne Arundel County. Wilkins inherited her love of community service from her parents-- Willie and Rosemary Wilkins. She represents the second generation of women in the community who invested in youth. Wilkins's sister, Ericka Wilkins, still volunteers. Courtesy Photo

Rayonah Foote, a 7th grader who attends Annapolis Middle School, met “Ms. Cassandra” at church. “She made me feel very comfortable. I could tell her about anything,” Rayonah said.

The mentee still looks back on the old text messages sent by “Ms. Cassandra.” Sometimes, she still plays a voicemail to hear her voice.

“Really, anybody can be like a mother,” Rayonah said. “And Miss Cassandra, even though she didn’t have kids, she was always there for us. She treated us like her own.”

Rayonah added that she would encourage caring women in the community to continue volunteering, because “you never know if a kid is having a tough time and needs someone.”

Ericka Wilkins is keeping her sister’s legacy alive to continue the family’s legacy of teaching others to conquer adversity through causes Cassandra held dear to her heart. Ericka picked up the baton to volunteer when she was about



Cassandra Wilkins and her family mentored many youth in the Annapolis area. Photo: Tyneka Meade

s17 years old and has not looked back. She initially conversed with young people who entered the family beauty salon and hair supply business. Then she started volunteering, too.

“I always would talk with the young adults about their goals and dreams. I always had an interest in making sure

they knew they had some options and possibilities that they might not have been aware of. I always felt as though the story was always told for the youth in a way that it didn’t look like it had much hope, so wanted to give them another side of life,” Ericka said.

She has been helping youth through Washington, D.C.- based Super Leaders for nearly 30 years. The group targets children who could use assistance. Although Ericka doesn’t have biological children, she routinely imparts motherly values.

“I just feel that sometimes you’re drawn in a certain direction. Family is not only biology. It is basically love, caring, respect, patience and kindness. Just showing love to someone can make the difference of somebody feeling their worth or not, or living up to expectations versus living down to stereotypes,” Ericka said.

Before COVID hit, Ericka could be spotted walking through the halls of Annapolis High School wearing her signature smile, investing in youth where she was once a student. But for her, volunteering led to life-long relationships. Some youth are now family.

Tymiesha Barnes is one of Ericka’s “daughters.” Tymiesha has known them for at least 13 years now. She is now a mother herself. Barnes credits the Wilkins for grounding her in God, teaching her compassion, how to be a lady, and learning to take her education seriously.

“They used to come to my house and drag me to school,” Barnes said. “They were really persistent. It got to a point where I really didn’t have a choice. Like they just became... my family. Ericka became my mom and just kind of blended. It’s like that tough love.”

The Wilkins women prove that some mothers are connected to children by blood, while others are earned through the beauty of love.

Alaska Airlines reveals “Our Commitment” aircraft in partnership with UNCF

Seattle— Alaska Airlines’ “Our Commitment” aircraft took to the skies in partnership with UNCF (United Negro College Fund), a symbol of the airline’s promise to create a place where everyone sees themselves and belongs. Designed with Alaska’s Air Group Black Employees, Allies and Advocates (ABEA) group to illustrate the airline’s belief in education as the great equalizer and as a critical component of creating sustainable racial equity, the aircraft features 14 profiles of the next generation of leaders: the children, grandchildren and mentees of Alaska’s employees. The aircraft made its inaugural flight from Seattle to Washington D.C., on Tuesday, April 27, 2021.

“As a company, we know we are not yet where we need to be when it comes to diversity, but we are inspired and guided by our value to *do the right thing*. With this aircraft, we are doing the right thing by amplifying the conversation around education, equity and belonging and taking it to the skies,” said Ben Minicucci, Alaska Airlines CEO. “This aircraft will continue to be an inspiration for us on the journey.”

The aircraft embodies Alaska’s long-term partnership with UNCF, the largest scholarship provider for students of color and an organization dedicated to enabling under-represented students to become highly-qualified college graduates.

“Our Commitment” will fly throughout Alaska’s network year-round spreading the word about UNCF and inspiring conversation around racial equity and the transformative impact of education in the lives of young people.

“While small in number, our HBCUs are landmarks to our past and keys to our future. They enable us to keep a legacy—by their very existence. HBCUs are much more than schools. They are



With the “Our Commitment” aircraft, Alaska Airlines is honoring its value of “doing the right thing,” taking the conversation around education, equity and belonging to the skies. The aircraft features the profiles of 14 children, grandchildren and mentees of Alaska Airlines employees, along with two quotes that have inspired the airline’s diversity, equity and inclusion work.

Courtesy Photo/Alaska Airlines

places where Black students can feel safe, welcomed, and embraced by the college community,” said Dr. Michael L. Lomax, president and CEO of UNCF. “Additionally, the nation’s HBCUs make up just three percent of America’s colleges and universities, yet they produce almost 20 percent of all African American graduates and 25 percent of African American graduates in the STEM fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics—the critical industries of the future.”

This special paint theme builds on more than 15 years of partnership, including Alaska employees and guests donating millions of miles to UNCF to fly students to college tours and campuses at numerous Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCUs). Alaska has committed to donating an additional 10 million miles over the course of the program and has also established a scholarship fund to help overcome the financial obstacles of

getting a college education.

“As the only Congresswoman to graduate from Clark Atlanta University, I know firsthand how crucial a world-class education from an HBCU is to opening up pathways for success. Educational equity is the key to building a brighter, more inclusive future for all students, including those who are traditionally underserved. I was truly honored to join the inaugural flight from Seattle-Tacoma Airport to DC to celebrate this historic partnership between Alaska Airlines and UNCF to promote education, equity, and diversity,” said Congresswoman Marilyn Strickland.

Earlier in 2021, Alaska Airlines launched its new diversity, equity and inclusion commitments to increase BIPOC representation in leadership, continue to cultivate an inclusive culture and to lead publicly by supporting education on the path to equity. These goals include:

*By 2025, Alaska Airlines will increase

racial diversity at all levels to at least 30 percent, including at the leadership level to reflect the diversity of its frontline employees.

*By 2025, Alaska will increase its “Inclusion Index Score” in its employee engagement survey by 10 points, reflecting its commitment to cultivating a truly inclusive culture where everyone feels like they belong.

*By 2025, Alaska will help create career pathways for at least 175,000 young people through continued partnerships with organizations like UNCF.

“As a leader in aviation, we have a responsibility to use our platform and voice to spark much needed conversations around the need for greater diversity, equity and inclusion within our industry, and that starts from the top down,” Alaska Airlines CEO Ben Minicucci said. “Our greatest opportunity is to increase the diversity of our leadership levels to reflect the diversity of our broader employee population.”

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Sonia Manzano, Sesame Street's Maria to headline library virtual author meet and greet

Towson, Md.— Baltimore County Public Library (BCPL) is set to welcome Sonia Manzano, the Emmy Award-winning actor who defined the role of Maria on the acclaimed television series *Sesame Street*, for a virtual program on May 11, 2021.

The author will discuss her time on *Sesame Street* and read a selection from one of her children's books.

Manzano, best known for her portrayal of Maria on *Sesame Street*, joined the series in 1971 where she eventually began working as a writer. She was nominated twice for an Emmy Award as Outstanding Performer in a Children's Series and won 15 Emmy Awards as a writer for the show.

"I, like millions of children, grew up watching Maria on Sesame Street," said Baltimore County Public Library Director Sonia Alcántara-Antoine. "The character of Maria encapsulates why representation matters in literacy and early learning. Sonia Manzano is a pioneer who has shaped the lives of generations of children and paved the way for the type of work that we are doing at Baltimore County Public Library."

In addition to her acting and screenwriting career, Manzano is a published author. Her books include: *No Dogs Allowed!*; *A Box Full of*



Baltimore County Public Library welcomes actress, screenwriter, author, speaker and singer-songwriter, Sonia Manzano who played Maria on Sesame Street for a virtual program on Tuesday, May 11, 2021
Courtesy Photo/BCPL

Kittens; Miracle on 133rd Street; The Lowdown on the High Bridge; The Story of How New York City Got Its Water; The Revolution of Evelyn Serrano; A World Together; and memoir Becoming Maria: Love and Chaos in the South Bronx.

Most recently, Manzano was featured in Michael Davis' *Street Gang: The Complete History of Sesame Street*, now a major motion picture. This book served as inspiration for Foundation for Baltimore County Public Library's C is for Cookie fundraiser.

Program information and registration: <http://bit.ly/SoniaManzano> BCPL



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Positive stories about positive people!

The Annapolis Times, May 7 - 13, 2021 (www.baltimoretimes-online.com)

Page 11

Rambling Rose

Happy Mother's Day!
Live entertainment is truly coming back!



Rosa Pryor Trusty

Hello everyone, I am hoping and praying that my column finds you in the best of health. For the first time in a very long time I am not posting a death notice in my column. Do you know how happy that makes me? This week is truly about live entertainment, fun things to do and celebrations on the positive side. I pray that it stays this way. If you believe and respect the "Rambling Rose" column, than I am asking you to please continue to wear your mask, get your COVID-19 shots and continue to practice social distancing. The Fat Lady has not sung yet, she is just tuning her voice.

Okay, let's talk about some fun things to do for this Mother's Day eekend as well as next weekend.

God Bless this trio— Pamela Leak aka "Miss Maybelle," Tee-Shirt Brian and Larry Young. They are doing it again— The Big Food Giveaway on Saturday, May 8, 2021 from noon to 3 p.m. at the Arena Players located 801 McCulloh Street in Baltimore City. You can help them out by stopping by and taking some bottle waters, non-perishables food items, toiletries and anything else to give to the less fortunate and homeless. They would appreciate it and it should make you feel good too. For more information, call Ms. Maybelle at 443-226-8895.

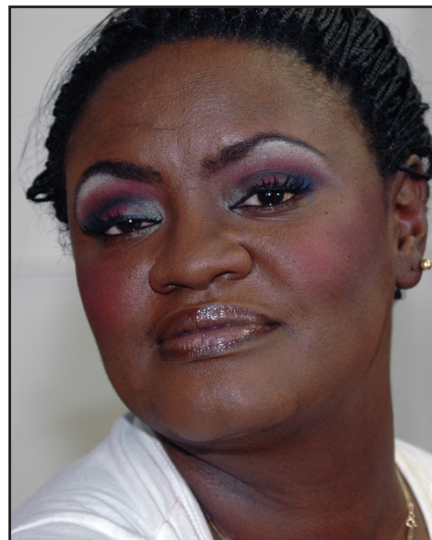
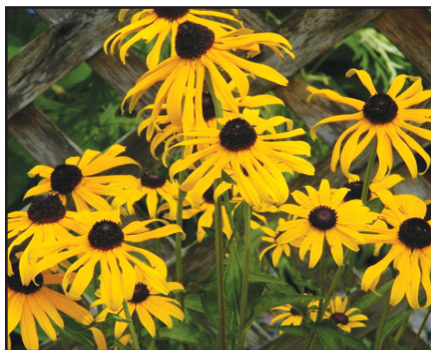
The Raven's Roost #79 is having a Flea Market Scholarship Fundraiser at the Corinthian's Lounge on Saturday, May 8 from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. The vendors will be selling Raven's Gear, household cleaning products, jewelry, masks, T-shirts and Black art. There will be music, food and a lot more. For more information, call Vanessa at 410-369-8918.

The Preakness opens with the 97th Black Eyed Susan Day on Friday,

May 14, 2021 and will again feature the \$250,000 George E. Mitchell Black Eyed Susan Stakes and the Maryland Jockey Club announces the renaming of this historic race to honor the late George E. Mitchell and his work within the Park Heights community. Black Eyed Susan Day offers world-class racing along with premier hospitality offerings and entertainment throughout the day. The day will be highlighted by the running of two prestigious races— The Black-eyed Susan for three-year old fillies and the Pimlico special for older horses.

In my last column, I informed you that William ("Wild Bill #1) Quinn, Sr. passed away on April 16, 2021. I couldn't give you any more information before my deadline; but his family with sincere gratitude want to thank everyone for the sympathy, love, affection and support that was extended to them during their time of loss.

Well my friends, I got to go, but remember, if you need me, call me at 410-833-9474 or you can email me at rosapryor@aol.com or you can send me your correspondences to 214 Conewood Avenue, Reisterstown, Maryland 21136. **UNTIL THE NEXT TIME, I'M MUSICALLY YOURS.**
7 Attachments



"Miss Maybelle," "Tee Shirt Brian" and "Radio One's Larry Young are hosting a "BIG! BIG! FOOD GIVEAWAY" on Saturday, May 8, 2021 from noon to 3 p.m. at the Arena Players located at 801 McCulloh Street in Baltimore City. Bottled water, non-perishable items, toiletries and volunteers are needed. For more information, call Maybelle at 443-226-8895.



Shirley Duncan class of 1965 of Frederick Douglass High School Duck is having an "All White Party" on Saturday, May 8, 2021 "In the Yard," at 4104 Green Spring Avenue. Masks are required! There will be lots of dancing, cash bar and comic show. You must wear all white— no exceptions! For more information, call 410-523-0575.



The Jerk Garden located 101 E. 25th Street in Baltimore is hosting "Summer Jazzy Nights on Saturday, May 8, 2021 from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. and thereafter every second Saturday through September

Black-Eyed Susan Day at the Preakness is Friday, May 14, 2021 at the Pimlico Race Course located at 5201 Park Heights Avenue in Baltimore City.

Ravens bank on upside of Odafe Oweh

By Tyler Hamilton

Every year there are a few prospects that test extremely well and cause an NFL team to disregard a prospect's lack of production in their college career.

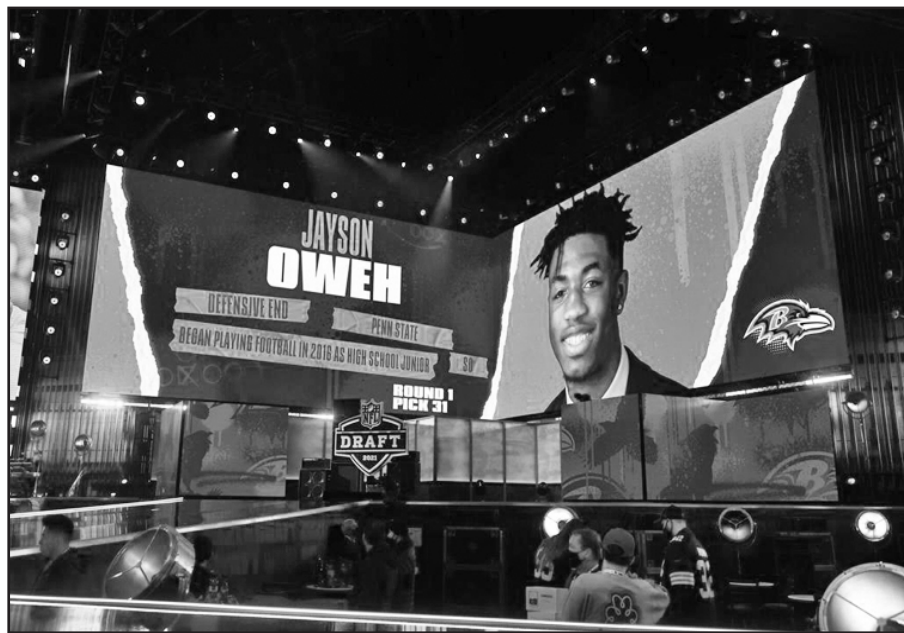
"He has all of the traits!" That's what you'll hear when teams explain why they selected a player even though his collegiate resume isn't exceptional.

This year, there wasn't an NFL Combine for prospects like Odafe Jayson Oweh to show off his freakish athleticism. Oweh put all of his traits on display when he worked out at Penn State's pro day.

At 6-foot-5 and 257 pounds, Oweh posted a 4.39 second time in the 40-yard dash. He finished with a 39.5-inch vertical leap and broad jumped 134 inches. All of those numbers are eye popping.

Ravens director of college scouting Joe Hortiz was at Oweh's pro day and took notice.

"A lot of us didn't have a chance to go out and see these guys physically," Hortiz said after day one of the draft. "Myself and [outside linebackers coach] Drew Wilkins were there, and we were able to watch him perform right in front of us. To watch him bend— [to] watch him explode [and] to turn the corner through the bags, it was really



The Baltimore Ravens used their second first-round selection in the 2021 NFL Draft on Odafe Oweh who is arguably the most athletic edge rusher in the entire draft. Joe Hortiz, Ravens director of college scouting was at Oweh's Pro Day at Penn State and took notice of his explosive athleticism.

Photo Credit: Gregory Shamus/Getty Images

impressive. It just kind of matched up with what you're seeing on tape in terms of athleticism."

The traits were clearly there for Oweh. However, not being able to get a single quarterback sack despite all of the speed and explosiveness was a concern for many draft analysts. Not for the Ravens,

especially coach John Harbaugh.

"That's something we talked about, but we also watched the tape. Then you look at his athletic ability, and just for that very fact, we feel like he's a great fit in our defense," Harbaugh said last Thursday. "He's an aggressive player. He runs to the ball very fast. He's in the

backfield constantly. He's knocking people back into the backfield. He's beating tackles into the backfield. He runs things down from behind."

Oweh wasn't worried about not having a sack last season and how it could impact his draft status. He instead chose to point to other parts of his game that made him a well-rounded prospect.

"I knew that people that really understood and watched football, understand what I was doing out there, and that sacks weren't where it ended with me. I was very disruptive; I caused a lot of havoc; I was very stout in the run game; I was beating my man; I was always there. So, people really understood that the zero sacks thing, that had no definition of who I was as a player," Oweh said.

Oweh joins a group of pass rushers that includes Jaylon Ferguson and Tyus Bowser as likely starters. Both of those players are more powerful players and Oweh will add a speed element to the outside linebackers helping to round out the group.

Using a first-round pick on a player is a clear sign that the team feels they'll get a boost by adding him to the roster. That's a tall task but Oweh is up for the challenge.

"I'm ready to be everything I can be and unlock my full potential with Baltimore," Oweh said.

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³Based on customer experience reviews shared online at www.thehartford.com/aarp as of February 2021.

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Five questions to ask yourself before taking the leap to entrepreneurship

News & Experts— As COVID-19 causes layoffs and extends uncertainty about employment in 2021, many people are considering new options, reinventing themselves, or trying to decide whether working for themselves is more desirable than finding another 9-to-5 job that might not last.

Entrepreneurship brings a lot of freedom, responsibility, and risks, and before people commit to taking that big step there are several important questions they should ask themselves, says Tim Mercer, ForbesBooks author of *Bootstrapped Millionaire: Defying the Odds of Business*.

“Entrepreneurship is a career that offers a kind of freedom and personal satisfaction you simply cannot get from traditional 9-to-5 employment,” Mercer said. “You will never know if you have what it takes to be an entrepreneur unless you take the leap of faith and experience it yourself.

“It’s a big decision, though, involving many factors and inherent risks. There is a lot to navigate and endure en route to reaching your dream destination of professional and financial freedom, and many don’t make it because they simply weren’t cut out for the challenge to begin with.”

Mercer thinks people who are considering entrepreneurship should first ask themselves these five questions:

Why do you want to do this? “Let’s be honest,” Mercer said. “If the business endeavor is just about us, we will want to give up on ourselves when things get hard. Your why, which is your purpose, has to be much bigger than yourself. You must believe in a vision of why you want to be an entrepreneur and develop



Entrepreneurship brings a lot of freedom, responsibility and risks, and so before people commit to taking that big step there are several important questions they should ask themselves.
Photo Credit: ClipArt.com

a plan for how you will involve others in your vision. Sustainable entrepreneurship requires the efforts of other people.” Mercer thinks it’s imperative to write down your ‘why’ and keep it in front of you as a reminder when tough times come.

Are you being realistic? One can get swept up in the emotion of starting a business, but Mercer says it’s vital for every potential entrepreneur to be realistic in their business projections for the first two years of the startup. “Answering this question before you open can prevent some unpleasant surprises as you try to build your company,” Mercer said.

Do you have daily discipline? “You are the boss, and only you can hold yourself accountable,” Mercer said. “If it’s hard for you to stay on task or stay motivated, and you think being an entrepreneur is a fast ticket to easy street, entrepreneurship definitely is not for you.”

Can your relationships survive the sacrifices? The time commitment, Mercer notes, to starting one’s own business and getting it running efficiently goes well beyond a typical 9-to-5 job. Relationships can suffer.

“All entrepreneurs have to understand that they are going to be forced to make sacrifices on a personal level with their

idfamily and friends,” Mercer said. “You have to stay focused without letting your dedication to your entrepreneurial pursuit harm your relationships with those you are closest. Communicate with them and mutually come up with adjusted expectations as you build the business.”

Can you withstand the struggles?

Rejection and failure, Mercer says, are realities that new entrepreneurs have to get accustomed to and learn to overcome. “You need to understand how many times you’ll fail before you’ll succeed,” he said. “You’ll get turned down by prospective customers constantly and your self-value will be tested on a daily basis. Is your why strong enough to keep you going?”

“Overall, deciding whether you are an entrepreneur or not boils down to how comfortable you are being uncomfortable,” Mercer said. “Only time will tell if you have the people skills and business skills to be a successful entrepreneur, but rest assured that you will have to endure periods of real discomfort.”

Tim Mercer is the founder of IBOXG, a company that provides technology services and solutions to government agencies and Fortune 500 corporations. After growing up in difficult economic circumstances in the rural South, Mercer achieved success as an entrepreneur, then recovered from the financial crisis of 2007-2008 after starting IBOXG. The company has accrued over \$60 million in revenues since its inception in 2008. For more information, visit: www.timtmercer.com

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