

## 'Serenity House: From Addiction to Deliverance' Acclaimed Baltimore Playwright Releases New Book



From Baltimore playwright, journalist, and entrepreneur Ursula V. Battle (pictured right) comes her first book, *Serenity House: From Addiction to Deliverance*. Based on her highly-acclaimed stage play of the same name, the Novel will make its debut at her production, being performed Aug. 27-29, 2021 at the Huber Community Life Center, 5700 Loch Raven Blvd. Battle is pictured with show director Dr. Gregory Wm. Branch, who penned the Novel's Foreword and Baltimore Times Publisher Joy Bramble. Battle has two book signings coming up, and will also be among the entrepreneurs participating in the 1st Annual Times Community Services Baltimore Maker Marketplace in September. (See the article on page 8) Courtesy Photo



# Question: I am drowning in hospital bills and debt collectors are hounding me. Is there any way to get out from under these bills?

By Aja' Mallory

**Answer:** As much as we try to avoid them, illnesses and accidents do occur. Being sick is a difficult and stressful enough experience without having to worry about the inevitable bills you will receive later. Hopefully, the information below will help:

**Keep your bills organized—** Organizing your hospital bills and marking bills that you have paid will prevent overpayment. In addition, when collectors begin calling on these bills ask for the collector to verify the debt and match their documents with your documents. If you have documents that show that payments were made on a particular debt or a bill is completely satisfied, you have a defense and can ask that the debt collectors stop calling you. Make sure to ask that the debt collectors stop calling you in writing.

**Do a line-by-line-check of your bill—** If you have recently had a hospital stay, make sure you get an itemized accounting of your total charges. If an itemized accounting is not sent with the bill, contact the hospital, and ask for one. Many times, there will be errors on the bill that a phone call to the hospital or your insurance company can rectify. Double-checking your bills will ensure that you are not being charged for the same thing twice or services that you did not receive.

Additionally, when you receive a bill from the hospital, the hospital must send an easy-to-read information sheet that explains who you can contact about the bill, how to apply for financial assistance and government programs such as Medicaid (which can be retroactive, up to 3 months, if you qualify) or other



*Being sick or hospitalized are difficult and stressful enough without having to worry about the inevitable bills you will receive later. It is important to know your rights to be able to reduce the amount of your medical debt and its adverse consequences.*

Photo Credit: Wayhome Studio, Adobe Stock

programs that might help. They also need to advise you as to your rights with respect to the bill, and they need to notify you that you will receive separate medical bills for physician services or what may not be covered.

**Ask the hospital for financial assistance programs—** Nonprofit hospitals have written policies to reduce or even eliminate certain medical charges if you are eligible for financial assistance. Charity care and financial assistance programs are required by Maryland law, and these programs need to provide free or low cost medically necessary care for low to moderate income families and patients.

Free health care is provided to patients with family incomes that are at or below 150 percent of the federal government poverty level. Reduced costs must also

be offered to other low-income patients with total family incomes above 150 percent of poverty levels. Hospitals are required to have standard applications for people to use when applying for financial assistance, and they must provide these applications to all uninsured and / or low-income patients.

**Bankruptcy—** When facing a waterfall of medical bills, bankruptcy is a solution and can provide an out for people drowning in debt. There are several types of bankruptcy. You should consult with an attorney to find out what type is best for you.

#### What Not To Do:

**Do not use credit cards to pay medical debt—** The worst thing you can do is incur more debt to pay medical bills. Delinquent credit card debt affects

your credit score immediately. Medical debt is a low priority debt. While medical debt may eventually end up on your credit report, it will not show up for months and hospitals are less likely to bring collection suits on an overdue bill than credit card companies. If you request financial assistance, nonprofit hospitals cannot start a collection action against you until it determines your eligibility. Regardless of if you qualify for financial assistance, hospitals are willing to reduce the amount of delinquent debt if you can show financial hardship. Once you put medical debt on your credit card, you lose these opportunities.

**Do not ignore the bills—** Although it can be very tempting to hide your head in the sand when it comes to bills piling up, that is not something you want to do. Medical debt's status as a low priority debt does not mean that one should ignore medical debt. You have special rights concerning medical debt, and it is important to know these rights to be able to reduce the amount of your medical debt and its adverse consequences.

To learn more about free civil legal help, visit Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service's website at [www.mvlslaw.org](http://www.mvlslaw.org).

*Aja' Mallory is a staff attorney at the Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service (MVLS). Her practice focuses on housing and consumer issues for Marylanders of limited means.*

**Do you have a question you would like to see addressed in this column? Email [ask@mvlslaw.org](mailto:ask@mvlslaw.org) to submit your question to the Baltimore Times' legal tip column.**

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# Guest Editorials/Commentary

## First Black woman to train for FBI SWAT team

By Stacy M. Brown

NNPA Newswire Senior National Correspondent

@StacyBrownMedia

While growing up, Tai recalled the life-altering event of watching U.S. Marshals deputies serving a warrant in her neighborhood. One of the deputies stood out for Tai— a Black female.

Tai hadn't previously seen a Black female deputy, so she approached and questioned the officer who provided the stunned young African American with her business card so they could remain in contact.

For Tai, now a 32-year-old FBI special agent who typically investigates public corruption cases on the U.S. Island territory, the encounter has led to a historic moment. She is the first Black woman to train for an FBI Special Weapons and Tactics Team (SWAT).

"I'm one of those people where I have a task at hand, and I just focus on that task," said Tai, whose last name the FBI has withheld. "I don't really think about people looking at me."

Tai also counts as a soldier in the U.S. Army Reserve, according to a news release. She joined the FBI four years ago and has spent her career in Puerto Rico working on corruption cases involving non-elected officials. Before joining the FBI, she served as a deputy in Orlando, Florida's Orange County Sheriff's Office for five years.

The release noted that Tai "was drawn to the FBI after seeing the Bureau's response to a mass shooting in 2016 at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, where 49 people were killed."

"The amount of assets and the professional attitude of agents," Tai recounted. "They were organized, and they got stuff done."

FBI officials noted that one of Tai's fellow Army Reserve officers suggested that she would make a good FBI agent. She applied, went through new agent training, and the Bureau assigned her to the San Juan Field Office in 2017.

Almost four years later, Tai and four other agents "were sweating under the heat of a tropical sun, tactical vests, and the exacting scrutiny of field-hardened instructors training up a new cadre of SWAT operators."

"It's not for everybody," said Special Agent Owen Reese, a SWAT operator leading the training course.

The FBI's news release noted that the 10-week course prepares SWAT selectees for operations.

"The training crucible makes them more proficient at firearms, body movement, and critical thinking in stressful situations," Bureau officials wrote.

If Tai and her colleagues pass, they join their field office's SWAT team as probationary members— meaning they can do everything except entering houses.

Probation may last six to 18 months as the new operators gain experience. They are then sent to SWAT Basic at the FBI Training Academy in Virginia, where new operators from all the FBI's field offices go through three weeks of training to get officially certified by the body that oversees FBI SWAT operations, the Critical Incident Response Group.

"Hopefully, somebody will see that I was able to do it," Tai said during a short break between close-quarters battle training and firearms practice. "I'm not the biggest person. I'm not as strong as some of these guys. But as long as you have perseverance— because it does get really tough— you push through it and keep going."



## Community Affairs

### Governor Hogan announces Project Restore will begin accepting applications next month

Annapolis— Governor Larry Hogan announced that Project Restore, the State of Maryland's \$25 million economic recovery initiative to support small businesses and revitalize vacant retail and commercial spaces, will begin accepting applications in early September.

"The entire mission of our state government continues to be keeping Maryland open for business, and with this transformative Project Restore initiative we are jumpstarting the next phase of our economic recovery from COVID-19," said Governor Hogan. "As we begin accepting applications, I

encourage local businesses and developers to apply for these financial incentives and be part of our efforts to revitalize Main Streets and communities across our state."

Administered by the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development, Project Restore will provide new or expanding businesses with rental grants and sales tax relief rebates to help offset startup and operating costs during their first year.

To qualify, eligible entities must begin new or expanded operations in space that has not been generating sales tax receipts for at least the past six months. All applicants commit to occupying the space for a minimum of 12 months following receipt of the grant.

For more information and application details, visit:

[dhcd.maryland.gov/ProjectRestore](http://dhcd.maryland.gov/ProjectRestore).

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## We can save the world with our vaccines— without surrendering our IP to China

By Erik Paulsen

The Biden administration gave Beijing a gift when it endorsed a petition before the World Trade Organization to force the American developers of Covid-19 vaccines and therapeutics to relinquish their intellectual property rights to these medicines.

The Chinese government seeks to take over in biotech, a sector where U.S. innovators lead. Biotech is included in its “Made in China 2025” plan, which lists 10 sectors that China aims to dominate. The government intends to force anyone doing business in China in those spheres to hand over know-how.

Surrendering IP protections on biomedical technology has dire consequences. Foremost, it guts the foundation of biomedical innovation, which takes huge investments spanning many years to bear fruit. IP protections assure innovators that they can recover

those investments and make a profit. Losing IP protection would have a chilling effect on investments in the sector.

Equally injurious to America, the IP waiver would allow China to become a biotech powerhouse by piggybacking on

advantage to countries that are increasingly viewed as our adversaries, at taxpayer expense.”

Beyond the damage that an mRNA giveaway will inflict on US R&D investments, the waiver sends a signal that America could agree to force

and vaccines, saving lives and speeding economic recovery. Preserving U.S. leadership in biomedical innovation includes preserving the incentives that helped make it the world’s leader.

A final downside of the waiver is the ability for American firms to find a cure for the next pandemic. Among the greatest threats is bacteria resistant to our current arsenal of antibiotics that becomes a pandemic-inducing superbug. Already, the market for new antimicrobials is broken. Only a handful of biotechs have them in development, and many have gone bankrupt trying to commercialize one.

“A lot of people have rightly said we need to start thinking about preparing for the next pandemic now,” noted Craig Garthwaite, a healthcare-business professor at Northwestern University. “Suspending IP for vaccine manufacturers would send exactly the wrong signal for the future.”

For the sake of patients everywhere, American IP rights must stay protected. It’s the only way to keep China at bay and American innovators at work.

*Erik Paulsen represented Minnesota’s 3rd congressional district in the U.S. House of Representatives from 2009 to 2019. This piece originally ran in the International Business Times.*

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***“The mRNA technology, which undergirds the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines has uses beyond this pandemic. It has the potential to take on cancers and other diseases. With the waiver, China and others will be emboldened to use the once-proprietary mRNA know-how for broader research and applications.”***

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American innovation.

A waiver on IP for Covid-19 vaccines would accelerate the timeline for “Made in China 2025.” The mRNA technology, which undergirds the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines has uses beyond this pandemic. It has the potential to take on cancers and other diseases. With the waiver, China and others will be emboldened to use the once-proprietary mRNA know-how for broader research and applications.

Is this in America’s interest? Mark Cohen, an expert on Chinese IP theft, recently told the Washington Post that the waiver would deliver “a competitive

American innovators to part with trade secrets every time there’s a global crisis.

That attitude will arrest biopharmaceutical innovation. Small biotech firms spearhead 70 percent of the R&D pipeline, relying heavily on private investors to fund that work. If investors know that innovators may have to give away their discoveries in a global crisis, they’ll deploy their money elsewhere. That’ll make it even harder to draw the R&D investments needed to address infectious diseases, including drug-resistant infections and viruses. America is benefitting greatly from the early access to COVID-19 treatments

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# PCs for People leading the charge to close the digital divide in Baltimore

By Demetrius Dillard

A relatively large portion of Baltimore residents don't have access to technology or the Internet, and the coronavirus pandemic has only worsened the city's digital divide.

The pandemic, for the most part, has largely forced the world to resort to remote work, telehealth, virtual learning and online shopping—all of which require internet service. However, a lot of Baltimore's underprivileged students, employees and medical patients, many of whom are Black, don't have the luxury of logging onto a computer to get the services they need.

Fortunately, the Biden Administration has launched the Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) program, an initiative designed to help less fortunate families and households acquire affordable internet service during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Through this new program that launched May 12, 2021, eligible households will have access to more job opportunities, critical healthcare services, virtual classrooms and much more, according to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).

Local nonprofit and Internet service provider (ISP), PCs for People is one of the organizations leading the charge in closing the digital divide in Baltimore City.

PCs for People, one of the national leaders in digital inclusion, aims to get low-cost computers and affordable broadband internet into low-income households. The organization, headquartered in Minneapolis, Minn., has an electronic recycling service and urges computer users to lend their used devices to PCs for People rather than discard them so that they can be refurbished for distribution.



*PCs for People hosted an event at Gilmore Homes and gave away more than 300 devices (combination of desktop computers and laptops) while signing community members up for the Emergency Broadband Benefit program. (Above) Members of the community wait in line to sign up for EBB and giveaways at the PCs for People event.*

Courtesy Photo/PCs for People

It serves eight markets: St. Paul, Minn., Mankato, Minn., Denver, Cleveland, Baltimore, Kansas City, Mo., Oak Forest, Ill., and Belleville, Ill.

Those who are not enculturated to the digital world cannot compete economically, said Gary Bonner, the executive director of PCs for People-Baltimore. There are 90,000 households in Baltimore without computers or Internet access, he highlighted.

"This is a completely solvable problem, to be able to get people connected to the Internet, get them computers and make sure they know how to use them," Bonner said.

To fill out job and college applications, conduct banking transactions, perhaps attend a Zoom meeting or schedule a telehealth appointment, having internet access is an absolute must, he pointed out.

"In a city like Baltimore, you must be digitally literate," said Bonner, a native of East Baltimore. "We only have 610,000 people who live in Baltimore. And for that number of houses to have no computer, no internet helps you understand why the city remains at a poverty rate of 22 percent, and why 40 percent of the city residents earn less than the calculated living wage for Baltimore."

Here's how the EBB program works, as outlined by the FCC:

The program will provide a discount of up to \$50 per month towards broadband service for eligible households and a one-time discount of up to \$100 to purchase a laptop, desktop computer, or tablet from participating providers if they contribute more than \$10 and less than \$50 toward the purchase price.

EBB is limited to one monthly service discount and one device discount per household. To see the criteria that qualifies an individual or a household for the EBB program, or to apply, visit this link:

<https://www.fcc.gov/broadbandbenefit>.

PCs for People's local office is at 2901 E. Biddle St., where community members are trained to refurbish computers for reuse. Since PCs for People-Baltimore opened July 2020, it has distributed 3,800 computers to households and more than 2,000 computers to Baltimore City Public Schools students, according to Bonner.

The organization has recently established a six-week internship program that will teach students how to refurbish computers and become digital navigators, which will involve helping others understand how to use their technological devices. The first cohort of 15 interns are mainly students ranging from ages 16 to 23.

On August 5, 2021, PCs for People hosted an event at Gilmore Homes where more than 300 devices (combination of desktop computers and laptops) were given away while signing community members up for EBB. Bonner and his team are among those leading the efforts in closing the digital divide, which is more than providing Internet access—it's about creating life-changing opportunities.

"Closing the digital divide is much more than just getting people computers," Bonner said. "It is enculturation to technology."

PCs for People still needs more businesses to donate their retired technology, and is in search of establishments to partner with, as an ITAD (information technology asset

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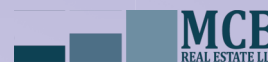
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## 'Serenity House: From Addiction to Deliverance'

# Acclaimed Baltimore Playwright Releases New Book

By Stacy M. Brown

A novel five years in the making, "Serenity House: From Addiction to Deliverance," written by Baltimore playwright, journalist, and entrepreneur Ursula V. Battle, will hit Amazon this month, and will soon be available digitally and in bookstores.

Based on Battle's highly acclaimed stage play of the same name, the book will make its debut at upcoming performances of the theatrical production, August 27 through August 29, 2021 at the Huber Community Life Center, 5700 Loch Raven Blvd. in Baltimore.

Published by Coal Under Pressure Publications and owner Chrita Paulin, "Serenity House" includes a foreword written by Dr. Gregory Wm. Branch, the health officer, and director of Health and Human Services for Baltimore County.

"When I saw the impact that the stage play had on audiences, I thought I wanted to write the book," said Battle, a magna cum laude graduate of Coppin State University, who also writes for The Baltimore Times.

"The book allowed me to delve deeper into issues covered in the stage play, and I wanted to have a way in which people could be encouraged on a global level," Battle insisted. "The book has given me the opportunity to do that."

A graduate of Walbrook High School and the Broadcasting Institute of Maryland, Battle has earned numerous awards for her work. Penning award-winning newspaper articles and top-flight plays appear easy, but Battle said writing the book posed other challenges.

"It's a lot different than journalistic writing and stage playwriting," Battle remarked. "I had to learn. I tapped into the professionalism of individuals such as Stacy Brown and other noted authors like Stella Adams and Odessa Rose, and I picked their brains in terms of the whole story writing process as it pertains to books.



***Ursula V. Battle is a Leah's Book Club Honoree, and has written several stage plays including Ursula V. Battle's DisChord in The Choir: Pitch Please!;, My Big Phat-Ghetto FABULE\$\$ Wedding, and The Teachers' Lounge. Courtesy Photo***

"I went back to school to educate myself on a lot of unfamiliar things. I did a lot of research, talked to authors and editors, took their experience, and applied it to writing the book. I also tapped into my experience as storyteller journalistically and as a playwright. It was a lot of time and painstaking hard work. It was a journey."

As noted in a news release, the story's backdrop is Baltimore's fictitious United Victory Church.

"Serenity House" is centered around Melvina A. Thomas, a young songstress with a powerful voice who grew up in the church singing gospel. Melvina's story is juxtaposed with Audrey Jackson, affectionately called Mama Jackson, the House Mother of Serenity House—a transitional home opened by United in Victory to help men and women recover from addiction by

offering them safe housing, counseling, prayer, and other means of intervention.

Mama Jackson runs Serenity House with Claire C. Voyant, a spiritually gifted, eclectic blind social worker with an epic tale of her own.

"Their lives all intersecting through Serenity House, this is their remarkable journey of love and loss, pain and pride, rags and riches, and trial and triumph amidst the most extraordinary of circumstances," the news release notes.

This multi-faceted drama exposes the insidious nature of addiction through them, along with a montage of many other intriguing, unforgettable characters and light-hearted humor, while traveling through the yesteryear of Baltimore and other parts of Maryland, simultaneously uncovering the shocking truth behind an elaborate

and scandalous set-up.

"I believe this book will be life-changing for those who read it," said Battle, who referenced the Bible passage, John 8:32, as the novel's foundation.

"That scripture says, 'you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free,'" Battle recounted. "The book is all about that scripture. It really encourages people and lets them know that, no matter what a situation looks like, God can turn that situation around."

To kick off the novel's debut, Battle will host two pre-launch book signings.

The first book signing is scheduled for Saturday, August 21, 2021 at 4 p.m. in the Atrium of the Greenspring Shopping Center at 2831 Smith Avenue in Mt. Washington. The second is scheduled at 3 p.m. on Sunday, August 22, 2021 at Coppin State University's Cab Calloway Room of the Parlette Longworth Moore Library.

With COVID-19 precautions in mind, both events require guests to RSVP for admission.

The Patapsco River Maryland Chapter of the Links Women In the Arts 2021: "Valiant Women of Freedom" and a "Leah's Book Club" honoree, Battle promises that "Serenity House" consists of two-parts that will leave readers anxiously awaiting its sequel.

She recited the Bible passage in which she bases the book, noting the importance of faith.

"God can turn a situation around and do it in a way that's mind-blowing," Battle exclaimed.

"You don't know how or when, but He does it in a miraculous way that supersedes anything we could have ever achieved on our own."

"Serenity House: From Addiction to Deliverance" retails for \$29.95 and will also be sold on Amazon.

To purchase a copy of the book, RSVP for one of the scheduled book signings, or for more information, call or text 443-531-4787 or send an email to [serenityhousethebook@gmail.com](mailto:serenityhousethebook@gmail.com).



# Baltimore Business Owner Shares Her ‘Gift’ of Crocheting and Card Designs

By Stacy M. Brown

Constance Mann-Leonard has a message for young women who aspire to open their own businesses.

“Make sure that you are doing something that drives you, something that is your passion,” said Mann-Leonard, who owns GIRGI— or God’s Ideas Are Good Ideas, Ltd.

“I think everyone going into business should do what they love, don’t do it for money, the money will follow,” Mann-Leonard insisted. “And do it whether someone else approves or not.”

The New York state native who moved to Baltimore years ago will present as one of the vendors in the Baltimore Maker Marketplace at Coppin State University’s Tawes Center.

The event, which takes place from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday, September 18, 2021, will feature products made and sold by Baltimore-based businesses.

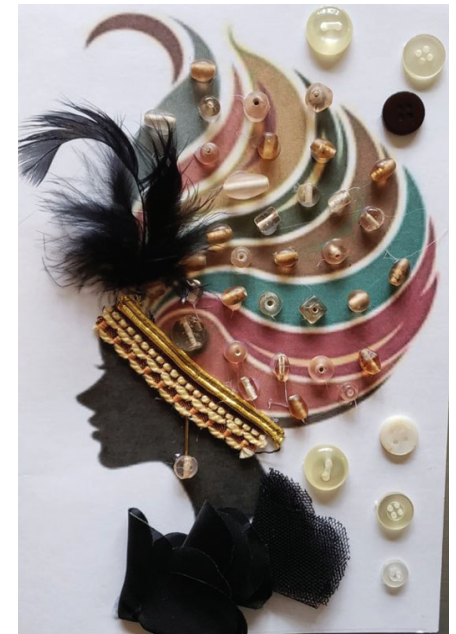
The Baltimore Makers Marketplace is presented by Times Community Services, Inc. and The Baltimore Times in collaboration with Fulton Bank; The Baltimore Development Corporation; Coppin State University Center for Strategic Entrepreneurship; and MCB Real Estate, LLC.

Mann-Leonard, who holds crocheting as a hobby, sells unique products through her company, GIRGI. Her crochet designs include sweaters, hats, and even stuffed animals.

“I come up with my own designs. I also learned how to read a crochet pattern,” said Mann-Leonard, who creates unique greeting cards utilizing broken jewelry. “I create 3-D Flower Cards and “Bling Cards.”

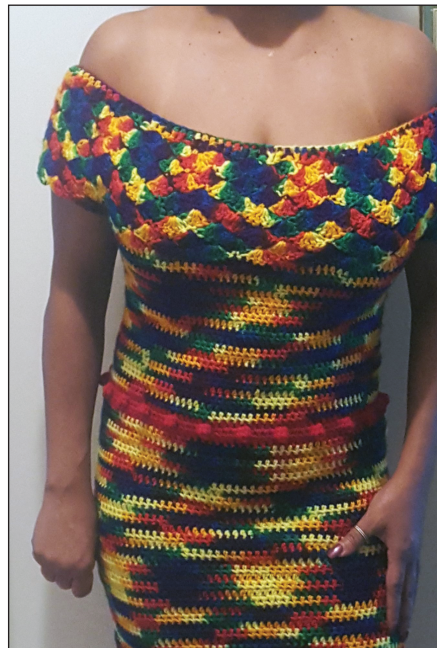
“It was an idea that came to me to put flowers on a card. Then God showed me the perfect way to put flowers on a card. I also had a business where a person could give me a list of their family’s birthdays, anniversaries, and other special events for the entire year.

“I would mail a 3-D Flower card from that client. People would tell me they would open those cards and never put



*Bling Card*

*Creations by Constance Mann-Leonard, owner, GIRGI  
(God’s Ideas Are Good Ideas, Ltd. (Courtesy Photos)*



*Stuffed Animal (Mouse)*



*3-D Flower Card*

them back in the envelope. I also create 3-D Christmas Cards. The idea to start designing Bling Cards came after attending a convention.”

Mann-Leonard insists that her creations come from a special gift she

has. She said it’s important that she share her gift with the world.

“Most of us don’t know what our gifts are,” Mann-Leonard remarked. “Some of us think that our gifts have to be extraordinary. Some people have the gift of charm, the gift of gab. My gift is that I create. I have a lot of inventory, so I

create from myself. It puts me in a place of peace.”

To learn more about GIRGI and Mann-Leonard’s creations, visit [www.girgiunlimited.com](http://www.girgiunlimited.com). For more information about the Baltimore Makers Marketplace, call 410-366- 3900 ext. 3022. To apply to be a vendor at the Baltimore Maker Marketplace event, visit <https://bit.ly/B2Mvapp>.



# Ricky Dorell Smith Appointed Greater Baltimore Urban League New Board Chair

Baltimore— The Greater Baltimore Urban League has appointed Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer of Baltimore/Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport, Ricky D. Smith, as its new Chairman of the Board of Directors. Smith has served on the board of director for the last four years and took his position on June 25, 2021.

“The Urban League has been a source of inspiration for me since childhood. It is one of my greatest honors to serve an organization that I have revered for so long while serving the community most dear to my heart. I am humbled and inspired to serve as the new chair of the Greater Baltimore Urban League and hope to meet the leadership expectations of the board, Tiffany Majors and her team and, most importantly, the public that this great organization serves,” said Smith.

Ricky Dorell Smith has been serving as the Executive Director/CEO of the Maryland Aviation Administration (MAA) since July 10, 2015. He is responsible for the management and operations of Baltimore/Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport (BWI Marshall), Martin State Airport, and regional aviation activities throughout the State of Maryland.

Overseeing major facilities expansions of the airports, enhanced the terminal concessions program, and expanded domestic air service. In 2017, the



*A welcome reception was held for new Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Greater Baltimore Urban League, Ricky Dorell Smith on August 5, 2021 at Motor House in Baltimore. Smith took his position on June 25, 2021. Courtesy Photo/GBUL*

LaunchPad program was started to enable minority-owned micro-businesses the opportunity to participate in BWI Marshall’s thriving food and retail program without barriers to entry. In 2015, he launched the BWI Marshall Summer Youth Initiative aimed at introducing youth in Baltimore City to careers in aviation and transportation.

To date, over 100 youths have participated in this program. These efforts led to BWI Marshall recently receiving the Airports Council International-North America Diversity Inclusion Award for Large Hub Airports.

Smith holds an Accounting degree from Howard University and an Executive MBA from Loyola University in Maryland. He is a graduate of several leadership programs, including the Greater Baltimore Committee and Leadership Cleveland. He is active on several national and local boards and industry associations including the Airport Minority Advisory Council, American Association of Airport Executives, the Washington Board of Trade, the BWI Business Partnership, World Trade Center Institute, Greater Baltimore Urban League, the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History & Culture, and the Morgan State University School of Communications Board of Advisors.

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## **Lawsuit filed to reduce asthma-causing sulfur dioxide air pollution in Detroit, Baltimore**

Washington, D.C.— Three public health and conservation groups [sued](#) the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on Wednesday, August 11, 2021, for failing to ensure that parts of Maryland and Michigan have effective plans for cleaning up sulfur dioxide air pollution.

Areas affected by the EPA's failures include Anne Arundel County and Baltimore County in Maryland, as well as parts of Metro Detroit in Michigan. These areas, which are home to nearly 1.3 million people, have sulfur dioxide pollution at levels high enough to trigger ecological harm and human health problems.

“The EPA's illegal delay in cleaning up this dangerous air pollution not only endangers the health of thousands of people but directly encourages the ongoing use of dirty coal and oil,” said Robert Ukeiley, an attorney at the Center for Biological Diversity. “Foot-dragging on requiring coal-burning power plants to clean up their act isn't going to get us the rapid transition to the renewable energy economy that President Biden's pledging.”

The Clean Air Act requires the EPA to identify and set national ambient air-quality standards to protect people and the environment from pollutants like sulfur oxides, which are mainly produced from the burning of fossil fuels like coal and oil.

When those standards are violated, the EPA must ensure that states have valid plans in place to clean up the pollution.

Sulfur dioxide causes a range of public health and environmental problems. It contributes to heart and lung diseases and is particularly threatening to children and the elderly. The EPA's updated scientific studies show a link between sulfur dioxide pollution and developmental harm to children.

“The research is clear, sulfur dioxide pollution leads to significant adverse health effects,” said Kaya Sugerman, director of the Center for Environmental Health's illegal toxic threats program. “The EPA is legally obligated to ensure that more people aren't needlessly impacted by exposure to unsafe levels of this dangerous pollutant.”



# Rambling Rose

The Avenue Bakery Celebrates  
10<sup>TH</sup> Anniversary



Rosa Pryor Trusty

Hello everyone, hoping everyone in range of the sound of my words are happy and in good health. We have a lot to talk about this week. Thank goodness! It's all good news.

Starting with the Avenue Bakery 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration. I am honored to be a part of it. On Sunday, August 15, 2021 from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m., the festive atmosphere will include: prizes; handouts; door prizes; live entertainment featuring Greg Hatza ORGANIZATION; and yours truly, "Rambling Rose" as your Mistress of Ceremony. There will be food, wines and beverages on sale. I will have my Pennsylvania Avenue books on hand for a book signing as well as my second book. Guests may also contribute to the "Rebuild the Royal Theatre One-Brick @ a Time" Fundraising Campaign. Guests must bring their own lawn folding chairs and it is free to the public in the outdoor courtyard. For more information, call 443-280-2702.

Ladies and gentlemen, after leaving the Avenue Bakery event, you can drive over to City View restaurant, located 6700 Security Blvd. on Sunday, August 15<sup>th</sup> from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. to the "All White Party," featuring the Panama Band, DJ. Mike Jones, and DJ Boobie. For more information, call 410-790-9333. Now, I know you heard me say "All White Party!" This does not mean a white shirt and black pants or ladies this does not mean a white dress trimmed in red, blue or yellow with red sandals because you think it looks cute. Fellows, please leave the jeans at home with the plaid shirt. IT IS AN ALL WHITE PARTY! Also Miss Maybelle will be celebrating her 55<sup>th</sup> birthday at this event. Free admission to this indoor/outdoor event. We will see you there.

If that is not enough, Honey Child! Check out the Silver Spring Jerk & Barbecue Festival 2021. Get a taste of Jamaica food booth. It will be on site with some of that jerk chicken, jerk pork served with rice and peas and salad; and my favorite, jerk fish. Live music with a little bit of jazz and a little bit of blues; a fashion show and wine tasting featuring Reggae Wines. To top it all off, it's Free to you all on Sunday, August 15 from 1 p.m. to 9 p.m. at the One Veterans Plaza in downtown, Silver Springs, Maryland 20910. For more information, call 301-221-6517 or 204-330-5127.

After a few days of rest, let's check out Catonsville R&B Festival at the American Legion Post #263, located 151 Winters Lane in Catonsville, Maryland on Sunday, August 22. This is an indoor and outdoor event. Gates open at 3:30 p.m. and Showtime at 5 p.m. There will be live entertainment performed by Slagz, Café Red and more. For more information, call Carlos Hutchins Productions at 443-963-5711 or Rudy Faison at 443-801-1100. Tell them "Rambling Rose" told you.

You know it's absolutely amazing how a few months ago, I had absolutely nothing to write about as far as entertainment is concerned and today I have run out of space talking about one week. I pray that this trend continues. Please folks, get your vaccine shots and wear your mask. I don't want to go back sitting on the coach or writing about my friends and your family death notices.

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



**James Hamlin and family's Avenue Bakery, "The Home of Poppay's Rolls" 2229 Pennsylvania Avenue, corner of Baker Street is celebrating their 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary on Sunday, August 15, 2-6 p.m. All are welcome. Congratulations my dear friend, wishing you another 10 years.**



**Shown here with his beautiful wife, Darlene, Baltimore says, "Congratulations to Carlton Douglass" for receiving the "Professional of the Year for 2020" at the National Funeral Directors & Morticians Association Conference in Dallas, Texas last week. He is a member of the Masonic Lodge and served as past president of the National and local Funeral Directors and Morticians Association for over 10 years. He holds the record of being the youngest mortician to be president of the National Association. Look forward to seeing his story in my next book. Congratulations my dear friend and Brother!**



**Dr. Elaine Simon, president, CEO and founder of the Baltimore Caribbean Festival doing her happy Caribbean dance moods.**



# Ravens Lamar Jackson faces difficult decision regarding COVID-19 vaccine

By Tyler Hamilton

The start of training camp didn't go according to plan for the Baltimore Ravens and star quarterback Lamar Jackson. Jackson was placed on the Reserve/COVID list for the second time in eight months.

"It was crazy. I was heartbroken, because I wasn't looking forward to that at all. Right before camp, it was like—not again. Not right now. But it's over with. It's over with." Jackson said.

Despite testing positive twice in the last eight months, Jackson was noncommittal when asked about getting the vaccine.

"I feel it's a personal decision. I'm just going to worry about that with my family. I'm going to keep my feelings to my family and myself. I'm focused on getting better right now. I can't dwell on that right now—how everybody else feels. I'm just trying to get back into a great routine," Jackson said.

Jackson says he is going to talk to team doctors about this vaccine as he works to



**Baltimore Ravens quarterback Lamar Jackson was noncommittal when asked about getting the COVID-19 vaccine, despite testing positive twice in the last eight months. Jackson says he is going to talk to team doctors about the vaccine as he works to get more information.**

**Photo Credit: BaltimoreRavens.com**

get more information. Fortunately, his second with COVID didn't bring excessive harm.

Jackson said the second time was

definitely not a bad as the first. He felt some fatigue and lost his sense of smell. This time around, he found himself sleeping a lot. That's still the case for him.

In the meantime he has a group of younger receivers to get used to connecting with. He also has to get himself ready for the rest of the season since he started later in camp.

"I'm taking it day by day. Hopefully, I'm doing good. I hope the coaches

think I'm doing well, [and] my teammates think I'm doing well. I'm just trying to catch up. I'm trying to catch up as much as I can, as fast as I can."

Jackson also has the addition of Sammy Watkins to the team. He is extremely excited to work with a veteran like Watkins.

"Sammy [Watkins] makes my job a lot easier, and my job is to make his a lot easier. Even when we're doing scramble drills and stuff like that, he's fighting off defenders, getting open. I missed him in the end zone—a little back shoulder," Jackson said. "He was right there. I'm mad I missed him. I'm still mad right now, even though it's practice. Practice makes perfect, so I'm trying to do whatever I can to make his job a lot easier. But he's, like I said—making my job a lot easier, and I love working with him. I'm glad he's here."

Getting back to full condition will take some time for Jackson.

"I'm working with the doctors and stuff like that, trying to ramp up my speed to get back to where I was. I'm trying to catch up with my guys, because they're on the train—like Coach [offensive coordinator Greg Roman] said, [and] I'm trying to catch the train. I'm 'in the car' right now [and] I'm trying to catch up to those guys. But yes, I'm just taking it a day at a time," Jackson said.

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# Prominent physicians speak to Black Media in 'We Can Do This' vaccine push

By Stacy M. Brown

According to a recent Kaiser Family Foundation Vaccine Monitor report, COVID-19 vaccine uptake among Black/African American populations continues to lag in at least 40 states.

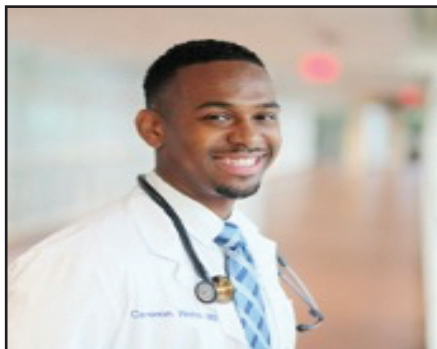
Officials said the need to address this trend remains crucial because of the recent rapid rise in COVID-19 infections and deaths, a sharp decline in vaccinations, the emergence of the more contagious Delta variant, and the misinformation and myths that persist about the virus.

During a call with members of the African American media, health officials held a briefing to discuss vaccinations and the "We Can Do This" campaign.

"The delta variant has become a major factor in what we're dealing with. It's almost a new pandemic," said Dr. Cameron Webb, the senior policy advisor for Equity on the White House COVID-19 Response Team. "People are getting sicker, and it's become the dominant variant in the United States. It's well above 93 percent of the cases, so it is the reason we see these upticks in cases."

Hospitalizations and more spread among the unvaccinated, including younger individuals, are getting sick because of the variant.

"The vaccinations do seem to be effective against this variant, and that's the good news," Dr. Webb added, noting that the efficacy rate in the Pfizer vaccine dropped from 95 percent to 88 percent when put against the delta variant. "It's



**Dr. Cameron Webb, senior policy advisor for Equity on the White House COVID-19 Response Team.**

such a critical moment in the Black community and all over this country when it comes to the vaccine."

The discussion counted as part of the Department of Health and Human Services "We Can Do This" campaign, a national initiative to increase public confidence in and uptake of COVID-19 vaccines while reinforcing basic prevention measures like mask-wearing and social distancing.

The latest figures from the Department of Health reveal that African Americans comprise 11.6 percent of all COVID-19 cases, despite making up just 12.5 percent of the U.S. population. Latinos make up about 28 percent of all cases, Dr. Webb noted.

For Black people, it is an improvement to some extent.

"It's an improvement, but any life lost from COVID is preventable at this time because we have these effective vaccines," Dr. Webb insisted, noting that



**Dr. Michele Benoit-Wilson, WakeMed Health, Raleigh, North Carolina**

about 13.8 percent of deaths from COVID occur in the Black community.

Complacency, confidence, and convenience are the "three c's" that have prevented more African Americans from getting vaccinated, Dr. Webb offered.

"We hear a lot of people say, 'I'm young, I'm healthy, I take care of myself, and I haven't seen a lot of people get sick,'" Dr. Webb recounted. "Then you have the confidence factor, where people distrust the health system. Finally, there is the convenience factor. While vaccines are everywhere at this point, across communities, there are a lot of barriers to access, and that's what has to change."

Georgeta Dragoiu, a White House Presidential Innovation Fellow on the COVID-19 Public Education Campaign, Dr. Rachel Villanueva, Clinical Assistant Professor of Obstetrics/Gynecology at the NYU Grossman School of Medicine and President of the National Medical



**Dr. Rachel Villanueva, Clinical Assistant Professor of Obstetrics/Gynecology at the NYU Grossman School of Medicine and President of the National Medical Association**

Association, and Dr. Michele Benoit-Wilson, WakeMed Health, Raleigh, North Carolina, also took part in the media briefing.

"I had to convince my own mother to get the vaccine," Dr. Villanueva revealed. "The National Medical Association is proudly joining the 'We Can Do This' campaign to increase public confidence in the uptake of the vaccine while reinforcing mitigation strategies in vulnerable populations.

"We are using facts and sciences and support informed decision-making about the vaccines. We want to protect our family and friends and protect those who can't take the vaccine, such as children under 12.

"We want all eligible Black Americans to have their questions answered and to get vaccinated. Together, we can, we absolutely must, and we will do this."



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