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Christmas is for Children: The Legend of Santa Claus

By Peter Bramble

Christmas is indeed for children and those who remain young at heart. That is why Santa Claus remains so popular in Western Culture and it would be near impossible to succeed at cancelling Christmas and its main themes built around Santa Claus.

What do we know about the person behind the legend of Santa Claus? We actually know quite a bit about the man who inspired this legend. The legend began centuries ago and was developed around a monk named Nicholas, who was born in the late 3rd century near Myra, a town in the country now known as Turkey.

Nicholas was considered a holy and devout Christian who became one of the most famous saints of early Christianity. It is said that he was a man who came from a wealthy family and that he gave up his wealth and went all over the countryside seeking out persons whom he could help, especially the poor and sick. Legend has it that he once bought three sisters who their father was about to sell into slavery because they were so poor. He then provided each sister with a dowry sufficient to get them husbands. It is believed that had Nicholas not done this good thing, the sisters could have become sex slaves to their new owner.

As his popularity spread throughout the regions, Nicholas became known as the protector of children and when he was sainted, he became the patron saint of children. Until the Protestant Reformation, Nicholas was the most beloved saint in certain parts of Europe, and he recovered his popularity in the centuries

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Ribbon Cutting Ceremony: Opening the Doors to Genius Guice Studios



(Left to Right): Sam Storey of Black Owned and Operated Storefront Tenancy (BOOST); Shelonda Stokes, president of Downtown Partnership of Baltimore; and Bryan Robinson of The Genius Art Show are cutting a ribbon in celebration of the grand opening of Genius Guice Studios, a brick and mortar home to artist Bryan Robinson's hybrid gallery of original art. (See article on page 7) Photo: Dena Fisher

Seasons Greeting from The Baltimore Times

As we approach the close of another year, we want to extend best wishes for a Happy Holiday Season to you, our faithful readers, subscribers and followers.

These last 21 months has challenged our resiliency. Throughout the pandemic, The Baltimore Times has continued to provide its print publication, showing up every day to work and never missing one issue in its 36-year history and it's because of you. Your stories inspire us to keep going and to continue reporting about all the good in our communities.

Thirty-six years ago, the idea of The Baltimore Times was inspired by Joy Bramble's desire to combat all the negative news about African Americans in the Baltimore community. After 36 years, the mission of our beloved community newspaper remains the same—to report positive stories about positive people.

We feel that our role is even more critical today than it was 36 years ago as we face increasing racial tension; the growing schism of financial inequity; increasing efforts towards disenfranchisement of black voters; unsolicited discriminatory force displayed towards young black men; and other emerging issues.

Yet, despite the predominantly adverse stories that make the national and local news, The Baltimore Times is encouraged by local non-profits, banks and corporate community partners that do their part to improvement “he community; the “kidpreneurs” who start a company to help those less fortunate; the stories of overcoming financial adversity to start a successful business after years of struggle; and corporate businesses that believe community investment and reinvestment is for the betterment of their business and the community they serve.



The Baltimore Times Staff wishes you Merry Christmas & Happy New Year

While we continue to acknowledge the remarkable accomplishments of our national community, we appreciate the everyday Baltimore area community residents doing extraordinary things to improve their lives and the lives of others. You are our local heroes.

The Baltimore Times will continue to expand our

digital presence and how we report and deliver the news. We invite you to visit our digital platforms and share “our”/“your” stories. Visit our website at www.TheBaltimoreTimes.com to submit your story. We want to hear from you!

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Moving forward together

We've been through a lot together and have proved to be resilient. The approaching new year brings with it new possibilities to help our clients, communities and teammates move forward and prosper — safely.

Using our industry-leading digital tools, like mobile check deposits, Erica®, CashPro® and access to Zelle®, individuals and businesses are finding it easier to do their everyday banking. Across the country, the expertise of our specialists and our teammates in financial centers is helping clients meet all their financial needs at every stage of their lives.

In our communities, we continue to collaborate with local partners, business leaders, experts and academics across the public and private sectors to fuel job growth and financial stability. More than \$400 million of our \$1.25 billion commitment to advance racial equality and economic opportunity is already supporting diverse small businesses and partners, including many recipients here in Greater Maryland who provide job skilling and hiring programs.

We've also increased resources to support our teammates' emotional and financial well-being. Recently, we raised our minimum hourly wage for U.S. employees to \$21 per hour, moving closer to our goal of \$25 by 2025.

My teammates and I look forward to growing existing partnerships and creating new ones as we work together to make a difference. Have a safe and happy holiday season.

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Guest Editorials/Commentary

Study reveals racial pay gap for social media influencers

By Stacy M. Brown

NNPA Newswire Senior National Correspondent

@StacyBrownMedia

The racial pay gap has long presented issues for African Americans in Corporate America and other industries. It's now filtered to social media.

MSL U.S. in partnership with The Influencer League, unveiled a first-of-its-kind research study, "Time to Face the Influencer Pay Gap," uncovering a vast racial divide in influencer compensation.

According to the research, the racial pay gap between White and Black, Indigenous & People of Color (BIPOC) stands at 29 percent.

When explicitly focused on the gap between White and Black influencers, it widens to 35 percent.

"It's a growing issue that Black creators face," said Howard University Senior Carrington York, who manages the Tik Tok account for the National Newspaper Publishers Association. "Not long ago, it was reported that Black Tik Tok users were shadow-banned, which definitely prevents their content from being monetized."

Micah Washington, a broadcast journalism major at Howard University, said the report didn't surprise him.

"Think about it financially. In the report, it talks about how 49 percent of Black creators who contribute regularly say they are offered low market value," Washington noted. "These Black influencers are saying when they go to the brands and companies, and they are not receiving the right tools to fend for themselves. They are not shown how to make a deal.

"When this happens, it makes the gap wider because they don't have that professional representation or professional advice. That makes it harder for them to argue that this is racially biased. It comes down to pay transparency."

The report noted that those forces are amplified by orders of magnitude in the young and unregulated influencer industry where affluence and connections play an outsized role and with social platform algorithms perpetuating inequity.

Researchers found that a remarkable 77 percent of Black influencers reported follower counts in the lowest pay tiers, where compensation from brands averaged just \$27,727.90 (versus 59 percent of White influencers).

Conversely, only 23 percent of Black influencers made it into the highest tiers, where earnings averaged \$108,713.54 (versus 41 percent of White Influencers).

As concluded by the researchers, the result is that in this industry in particular, an unequal playing field becomes a nearly unbridgeable opportunity gap.

Further, the majority (59 percent) of Black influencers (and 49 percent of BIPOC influencers) reported that they felt negatively impacted financially when they posted on issues of race versus 14 percent of White influencers.

The report also flies in the face of the outpouring of diversity, equity, and inclusion pledges made by corporations around the globe.

"When it comes to a lot of these institutions, performative activism comes to mind," York said. "A lot of what they say don't always show with their actions."

"There have been rumors of a racial pay gap for years, but no one in our industry has quantified it until now," D'Anthony Jackson, Digital and Influencer Strategist at MSL, said in a news release. "These are stark numbers by any measure. Just compare the 35 percent gap between White and Black influencers to the pay gaps in other industries— education eight percent; business and financial 16 percent; construction 19 percent; and, media sports and entertainment 16 percent. The gap this study uncovered in influencer marketing vastly overshadows the gaps in any other industry."



Community Affairs

Marylanders have just 10 days to get health coverage starting January 1, 2022

Baltimore— Marylanders have two weeks left to enroll in health coverage that begins January 1, 2022 on the state's health insurance marketplace— Maryland Health Connection.

This year, open enrollment through Maryland Health Connection runs a month longer than in recent years.

Maryland residents can enroll in a private health insurance plan until January 15, 2022. Those who enroll by December 31, 2021, will have coverage beginning January 1, 2022. Anyone who enrolls during the first two weeks of January will have coverage beginning February 1, 2022.

"New federal and state laws offer financial help for those who did not qualify in the past," said Michele

Eberle, executive director of the Maryland Health Benefit Exchange. "More than three-quarters of those who already have enrolled qualified for savings on their 2022 plans."

There is also a new state subsidy to lower costs for enrollees between 18 and 34. More than 45,000 young adults have enrolled in private coverage for 2022 since November 1. And two-thirds of them have qualified for the additional subsidy to lower their monthly bills about \$36 on average.

This enrollment period is for private health plans only. Those who qualify for Medicaid may enroll any time of year.

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Ella Baker: A woman you need to know about

By Dr. Ken Morgan

Celebrate the life of Ella Jo Baker, born on December 13, 1903, in Norfolk, Virginia, raised in North Carolina. Much remains owed to Ella Baker, an unsung civil rights movement hero, who co-developed the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Baker, a giant in the annals of social and civil rights, passed away on December 13, 1986, at 83. She combined the talents of a great organizer, leading intellectual, a great teacher and the wherewithal to inspire.

Her grandmother helped ignite her internal social justice activist organizing fire as she listened to her grandmother's life under slavery. Baker's maternal grandparents bought, lived on, and farmed the plantation of their enslavement.

Young Ella attended and graduated from Shaw University in Raleigh, North

Carolina. As a student at Shaw University, she fought her school's unfair policies and still became the class valedictorian upon graduation.

Baker, most renowned, stands out for her social justice works in SCLC and SNCC. However, she moved to New York City upon graduating from Shaw

voting rights movement.

Baker worked in Atlanta for around two and a half years as interim executive director. She had no natural allies in a male-dominated setting, similar to her NAACP days. While at SCLC, she remained unsettled politically, physically, and emotionally. According

with confidence, "Ricks said. "Ms. Baker, she was Ms. Baker." "She is somebody who taught us to organize and to be confident." "She was a great organizer." That was her gift."

Ricks characterized Ella Jo Baker and the hundreds and thousands of others in the movement, both men and women, as "freedom fighters to free our people and to be willing to die and fight for the movement."

According to the publisher, the author Barbara Ransby saw Baker's moving and compelling biography *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* as a "complex figure whose radical, democratic worldview, commitment to empowering the black poor, and emphasis on group-centered, grassroots leadership set her apart from most of her political contemporaries." Baker's biography paints a picture of Black's struggle and fights for justice, blended in with worldwide efforts in the twentieth century.

Read Ransby's book, please, as well as *Ella Baker's Catalytic Leadership: A Primer on Community Engagement and Communication for Social Justice, and On The Freedom Side*.

"The major job was getting people to understand that they had something within their power that they could use, and it could only be used if they understood what was happening and how group action could counter violence....," Baker said about organizing, according to the Center for Human Rights.

Former Coppin State University Assistant Professor, Dr. Ken Morgan is an internationalist and Black rights activist. Reach him at kmorgan2408@comcast.net.

"Baker became one of the lead organizers and associate directors of SCLC. She battled bureaucratic and parochial imbroglios. She worked with civil rights groups across the South. Baker facilitated voter registration campaigns and the like. The SCLC stressed voting rights with the anemic Civil Rights Act of 1957 to protect local voters."

University in 1927. She worked with social activist organizations such as the Young Negroes Cooperative League and the Workers Education Project. Ella Baker toiled as a field secretary of the NAACP and then served as director of branches circa 1943 until 1953.

In January 1957, Baker attended a conference in Atlanta to help civil rights activist ministers to get a foothold on the civil rights movement. In February, SCLC got started. Its purpose was to build on the 1955 Montgomery Boycott. Dr. King became the head leader.

Baker became one of the lead organizers and associate directors of SCLC. She battled bureaucratic and parochial imbroglios. She worked with civil rights groups across the South. Baker facilitated voter registration campaigns and the like. The SCLC stressed voting rights with the anemic Civil Rights Act of 1957 to protect local voters. While the project failed to attain many of its goals, it placed the framework on constructing a mass

to Thomas Jackson, Baker saw the SCLC program as sluggish. King didn't get down to the grassroots. She saw him as a better orator than the leader he had become.

After the North Carolina A & T College Greensboro sit-ins, Baker left the SCLC. She saw new-infused youthful students as an asset and resource to the movement. She sought to help the new student activists at Shaw University. SNCC became the newborn baby at the Shaw University conference through her Southwide Youth Leadership Conference, which Baker founded.

Mukasa Willie Ricks, was a central SNCC student member. He remembers Baker as a go-getter for the new SNCC movement.

"She brought the youth together, SNCC created," Ricks said. "She struggled for, and won for the SNCC to be independent with their civil rights assignments and a staff."

"She advised us to be organizers and

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Associate Publisher

Paris Brown

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Website

Cieara Adams

Photographers

Dennis Roberts

Gar Roberts

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Mailing Address

The Baltimore Times

2530 N. Charles Street, Suite 201

Baltimore, MD 21218

Phone: 410-366-3900- Fax 410-243-1627

www.baltimoretimes-online.com

Want to comment on the editorials or any other story?

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Baltimore Food Entrepreneur Details Rise from Public Housing to Business Success

By Stacy M. Brown

Ayeshah Abuelhiga grew up in public housing in Baltimore, and like so many in her vibrant neighborhood, fried chicken and biscuits were the comfort food of choice.

So, when the energetic and driven Abuelhiga started Mason Dixie Biscuits Company with the \$27,000 she raised through a social media campaign, chicken and biscuits headlined the menu.

“I grew up in the kitchen, and I watched people of all types come in and out of my mom’s store in the Lexington Avenue Market, and I began thinking about what I would go out and do, and I knew it would be something in the food business,” Abuelhiga said.

Her passionate and delicate food handling led Abuelhiga to move her pop-up sandwich spot to a brick-and-mortar showcase.

“We had lines wrapped around four city blocks,” Abuelhiga recalled. “By noon, we would sell out, and one customer asked about freezing the biscuits. So, I had to think about how to do that. Eventually, that took on a life of its own.”

Whole Foods came calling, and Abuelhiga’s delicacies immediately sold out at that popular chain. Later, she stocked Mason Dixie biscuits at Wegman’s, Mom’s Organics, and Harris Teeter.

However, the pandemic struck in 2020, and Abuelhiga joined many other businesses that were forced to close. She then relocated her business near



Ayeshah Abuelhiga, founder, Mason Dixie Biscuits Company

Baltimore Inner Harbor and is thriving again.

“I had a career in tech and automotive where I was passed over a number of times as a woman and a woman of color, so I was sick and tired of waiting for the

next opportunity and was bold enough to think that I could be my own boss,” Abuelhiga asserted.

She also wanted to clean up the comfort food business, she said.

“I wanted to go back to scratch-made,

clean and label fresh from the farm ingredients,” Abuelhiga insisted.

With her products now sold in more than 8,000 stores, including Whole Foods Market locations and Target, Abuelhiga’s company has made it a mission to give back.

Although the threat of more COVID-19 cases has canceled the event, Abuelhiga had holiday plans to partner with the Franciscan Center to host the charitable organization’s annual children’s Christmas for 150 young ones in Baltimore. Instead, Abuelhiga and her Mason Dixie Foods team decided to participate in a toy drive by dropping off donations for children at the center.

She said her childhood struggles and limited resources growing up led her to remain determined to give back to the local community.

“This means a lot because I grew up poor in Section 8 houses in Baltimore City,” Abuelhiga said. “The city has a lot of promise and potential, and if kids can see people like me, it provides hope. But, from a dream perspective, you’re limited because if you can’t see it, you can’t dream it.”

Abuelhiga is proud that she just might be the source of the dreams eventually achieved by a younger generation of Charm City entrepreneurs.

“People in diverse communities always will do more because they want the opportunity to prove themselves,” Abuelhiga stated. “They want to be a part of a community and a social fabric, which typically exists at the employment level.”

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Ribbon Cutting Ceremony: Opening the Doors to Genius Guice Studios

By Dena Fisher

On Saturday, December 18, 2021, Bryan Robinson of the Black Genius Art Show held a ribbon-cutting ceremony and grand opening of Genius Guice Studios, a brick and mortar home to his collection of original paintings, wearables, collectibles, and animation-inspired garments. Many art enthusiasts, friends, family, and community leaders came out to celebrate this momentous occasion with him.

“I love his art. He has been drawing forever. He finally turned his artwork into clothing,” said Kimberly Smith, Robinson’s cousin, who was proudly outfitted in Black Genius attire. “We are very proud of him.”

“I started creating these cool, creative cartoon characters in middle and high school,” said Robinson. “They were my escape when I wasn’t paying attention in class. Now that same creation I started as a young boy has become the base of my business and the thing that I wake up every day to do.”

Robinson is among the first cohort of Downtown Partnership of Baltimore’s Black Owned and Operated Storefront Tenancy (BOOST) program, created to support and help sustain creative Black-owned Baltimore businesses in downtown storefronts. During this time when black own businesses are being disproportionately affected by the pandemic-influenced economic downturn, BOOST is assisting with standing in the gaps.

Shelonda Stokes, president of Downtown Partnership of Baltimore, while addressing the audience during the ribbon-cutting ceremony, said, “I came into this role during covid. I came into this role understanding that we need to make our downtown reflective of the demographics of our city. We came up with a program that was able to do both — we can help fill vacancies while making sure we are supporting our black businesses.”



Bryan Robinson’s Family. Front Row Left to Right, Kimberly Smith, Devieal Foster. Back Row Left to Right, Sharon Roland, Warren Smith, Steven Foster.

Photos: Dena Fisher



Friends and loyal customers wearing Black Genius attire. Left to right, LaToya Parker, Lauryn Parker Robinson.

Under the auspices of BOOST, Black-owned businesses, like Robinson’s Genius Guice Studios, are being provided with wrap-around services to assist with daily operations - including marketing, legal, and technical support. “We want them to win,” Stokes said. “This is not the end; it’s the start.”

Robinson underscores the vital role BOOST has played in his business. “A lot of us black artists don’t think we can make money off the things we create or know how to go through the business ethics of doing it. BOOST put us through intensive classes where we learned about contracts, lease agreements, a little bit of everything,” he said. “They take an artist who knows how just to paint, and they nurture you into a whole business mindset, and help you get your business to the next level and also be an asset to your community. They put me in a place where I am opening my own storefront, where I am can turn the key, control the environment, and create a hub for other creatives to come in and get experience.”

Many structural barriers hinder Black entrepreneurs’ efforts to start and sustain local businesses. Well aware of those barriers, Robinson is also cognizant of the persistent and systemic differences in opportunity for Black artists. “There weren’t a lot of resources for black creatives in communities where I was born and raised,” he said. “At one point, I was getting tired, tired of the doors closing.”

Now that he has been given the opportunity, he is committed to opening the door for others. “This opportunity puts me in the position to carry the mantle for other young black businesses and creatives,” he said. One day soon, “you will get to be the person who can turn the key, and then help someone else.”

The Gift of Outstanding Service

The Y Honors Amerigroup for Community Efforts

By Ursula V. Battle

In this season of giving, the Y of Central Maryland recognized Amerigroup Maryland for its dedication to health equity. In honoring Amerigroup Maryland, the Y recognized the efforts of Lori Hammond and Lanise Thompson. The women were presented with the Y's "Outstanding Partnership" award, which is given to community partners in the state that support the Y through various programs and grants.

Describing Amerigroup as a 'model partner to the Y and to the community,' the mission-driven, charitable organization noted that Amerigroup jumped in as full-fledged partners to help address health disparities worsened by the pandemic. Efforts included providing thousands of reusable grocery bags to support Y food distribution, PPE (Personal Protection Equipment) for families, a grant to help set up the Y Fresh Mart Food Pantry and coordinating COVID testing and flu vaccination events.

Hammond serves as Director of Marketing for Amerigroup Maryland, while Lanise Thompson is the health insurance coverage company's Outreach Manager.

"We were truly honored to receive this award from the Y," said Hammond. "It's just great to be recognized for the support that we do into the community and to be able to provide different varieties of items to the community."

Thompson added, "As a youngster, I grew up in the YMCA. This award was really an honor."

Amerigroup aims to provide healthcare and support for low-income communities, people with disabilities, the elderly, and other Medicaid-qualifying individuals. Amerigroup Maryland has provided health care coverage since 1999. Amerigroup has had a long-standing partnership with the Y, providing support for several events, including food and supply giveaways and flu and COVID Vaccines.

The mission of the Y of Central Maryland is dedicated to developing the



(Left) Michelle Becote Jackson, Chief Social Responsibility Officer for the Y of Central Maryland; and honoree Lori Hammond Director of Marketing for Amerigroup Maryland. (Right) Lanise Thompson, Outreach Manager for Amerigroup Maryland was also presented with the Y's "Outstanding Partnership" award. Courtesy Photos

full potential of every individual through programs that build healthy spirit, mind, and body for all. Impacting over 350,000 Central Marylanders, the vision of the Y is to provide bold leadership in advancing a holistic approach to well being that strengthens the community's commitment to healthy living, youth development and social responsibility.

The Y and Amerigroup share the values of inclusion and access for all, and highlighted their work together will continue to ensure that they reach those in need throughout the state. Amerigroup Maryland provides health insurance coverage for nearly 300,000 residents throughout the state and noted they are grateful for the continued opportunity to work alongside the YMCA of Maryland— efforts they say are having a significant impact on the entire community.

Hammond and Thompson were

honored at the Y's Appreciation Awards event held in Catonsville, MD. The other honorees from the Y's Community Leadership Board who were honored were Chuck Yocum, Edmund O'Meally, Walter P. Carter Elementary and Middle School, Sarah Jennings, Edward Evans, Thomas Mooney, Mary Jean Herron, David Vahos, Antonio Dismel, and David DiPietro.

"Amerigroup is a managed care organization, and we are dedicated to improving lives and promoting healthier communities," said Hammond, who has been with Amerigroup for 17 years. "We believe everyone deserves a medical home that goes beyond just providing access to care. It should also include the services and support people need to live healthier lives. We are proud to celebrate over 20 years of helping Medicaid members stay healthy. We are present in all counties in the state of

Maryland, so when we look at different ways for us to partner, we always look for ways on how we can help.

"We provide support to a number of our community partners in Maryland, as we understand the social determinants of health related to affordable housing, workforce development and living healthy lives. In fact, these are perfect examples of why we have given to the Y, and they are also right in the community."

"Anytime that I'm able to help the community, I'm always there," said Thompson, who has been with Amerigroup for 14 years. "We are very hands-on."

For more information about the Y of Central Maryland visit: www.ymaryland.org. For more information about Amerigroup visit www.amerigroup.com.

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Ravens may be short staffed due to Reserve/COVID-19

By Tyler Hamilton

The Baltimore Ravens like many other teams are dealing with the spike of the omicron variant of COVID-19. The NFL has intensified the COVID-19 protocols recently to try and offset the spike.

Sticking to the protocol is critical for all teams. That's especially the case for the Ravens who had an outbreak last season. The organization is doing everything it can to closely follow the new protocols.

"I don't know the details of what protocol stands for what; I just go by what we're told we have to do," Ravens head coach John Harbaugh said. "What we're in right now is some sort of an intensive protocol on some level, but we're not testing everybody daily. That's not what we're doing.

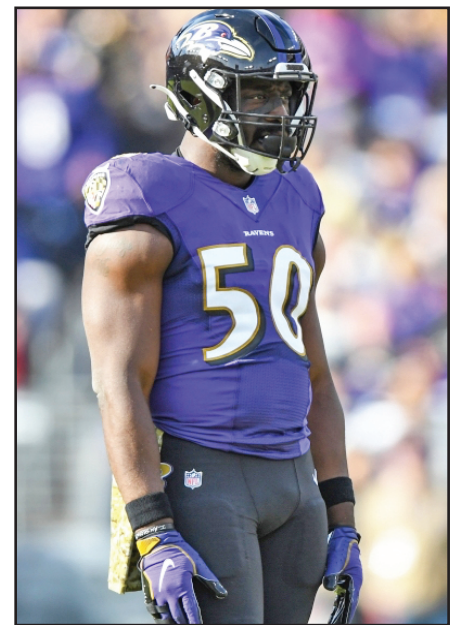
"We have to wear masks. We have to meet virtually for the next two days and wear masks for the next two days, and then I think they're going to see where we're at after that. So, we're happy with that. We don't have any problem doing that at all. We try to stay as safe as we can and see where we go from there."

The list of players currently on the Reserve/COVID-19 list includes:

- C Trystan Colon- Castillo
- S Chuck Clark
- CB Chris Westry
- WR Sammy Watkins
- CB Jimmy Smith
- OLB Justin Houston
- OLB Pernell McPhee

Houston was placed on Reserve/COVID-19 earlier this week putting his playing status in jeopardy for Sunday's game against the Cincinnati Bengals. The veteran outside linebacker is fourth on the team with 4.5 sacks. Houston has been responsible for pressuring the quarterback as well.

Baltimore has some of their best defensive players on the list including Clark, Smith and Houston.



Outside linebacker Justin Houston was placed on Reserve/COVID-19 putting his playing status in jeopardy for Sunday's game against the Cincinnati Bengals

Photo Credit: USA TODAY Sports Images.

Outside linebacker Pernell McPhee was added to the list on Tuesday, December 21, 2021. McPhee was gearing up to make his return to the field after being placed on injured reserve last month. In a corresponding move, they signed veteran cornerback Daryl Worley.

"The COVID-19/Reserve list—it's really going to be hard to say who is going to be back from that and when," Ravens coach John Harbaugh said.

If Houston and McPhee aren't available to play in Sunday, December 26, 2021, the Ravens will be very thin at outside linebacker. Only Tyus Bowser, Odafe Oweh and Jaylon Ferguson are listed as outside linebackers who will be available to play. The Ravens could have an option in Malik Harrison who has practiced at outside linebacker this week.

Sunday's game against the Bengals is a key game in the fight for the AFC North title. The Ravens' three-game losing streak has slid them into a tie with Cincinnati in the race for the top team in AFC North Division. Both teams have an 8-6 record.

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Christmas is for Children: The Legend of Santa Claus

Continued from page 1

that followed as Saint Nicholas, later to be the man behind the Santa Claus (Dutch) and Father Christmas (English) legends.

It was not until the 1770s that Dutch families in New York gathered to make his legend popular in New York. In the following decades, St Nicholas became very popular in America and gained traction after department stores and the Salvation Army popularized him for marketing and charity purposes.

The most memorable depiction of Santa Claus (Kris Kringle) came through the classic movie, "Miracle on 34 Street" in 1947. The famous Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, which ushers in the Christmas season, began in 1924 featuring the Macy's Santa. This parade continues to be popular to this day, and only war and pandemics seem able to threaten the continuance of this great tradition.

Have you ever heard someone say that there is no Santa Claus? You sure have! But how silly can we get when people who pretend that they are intelligent seek to cancel a story that conveys the message of love for others, particularly the poor and children, by giving gifts at this time of the year. The notion that an old, loving, fat man comes once a year to give gifts to children he does not know personally is so precious that it boggles the mind to think that people would object to that concept.

Then, the messages about Santa that come through our very popular Christmas songs remind children that they need to be nice and not naughty if they want to be gifted on Christmas Day. Remember this song: "He's making a list, he's checking it twice; he's gonna find out who's naughty or nice, Santa Claus is coming to town. He sees you when you're sleeping, he knows when you're awake, he knows if you've been good or bad, so be good for goodness sake!" What a teaching tool for morals!

My wife told me sometime ago that the old ways of teaching right from wrong were very significant to her upbringing. In those ancient days, parents



taught us that there was an invisible eye (the eye of God) watching over our behavior even when they were not present. This eye was able to check the behavior of the children of yesteryear in a very, very effective way. And, this Christmas song about telling children that there was a reward for good behavior, all year round, that was checked by the invisible eye of God—perhaps through Santa Claus—was indeed a powerful teaching tool for governing behavior. Not much is taught to children these days about the reward promised for good behavior, except through this little song about Santa Claus coming to town bearing gifts, mostly for well-behaved children. That is also a very good thing, in my judgment.

So, Santa offers much to the message of Christmas. He replaces the Three Wise Men of the East as the bringer of gifts to children. Of course, we know that parents are his "chief elves," that is why the wrong boy in another song, was right when he said, "I saw mommy kissing Santa Claus last night." He surely knew what he saw. Those two conspirators were doing Santa's work and the child caught them celebrating it.

Therefore, do not fail to keep those you love happy this Christmas by the sharing meaningful gifts, especially with our children who waited all year for their surprise. Please have a Happy, Merry Christmas and a Bright and prosperous New Year.

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