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Annapolitan Continues Easter Traditions, Promotes Community Togetherness



Ashley Ballinger, right, hosted a free 2022 Easter Egg Hunt in Annapolis on April 10, 2022 at the Annapolis Walk Recreation Center. Three-year-old Lailauna Reid, left, attended the event. Family-friendly activities were featured during the fun-filled time to celebrate Easter and allow the community to come together. Ballinger grew up enjoying Easter traditions. Through her event, she reminded others about the importance of having fun and indulging in fellowship through the pandemic's ups and downs. Ballinger is an active volunteer and event planner who owns her own business. (Article, page 9)
Photo credit: Courtesy of Ashley B, LLC

Art Things in Annapolis Will Return Through Collaboration

By Andrea Blackstone

A previously woman-owned, art supply store in Annapolis was recently acquired by Comacell Brown and co-owner, Todd Powell. Art Things is located inside of the multi-disciplinary arts center, Maryland Hall. The art has a long history of being independently owned. Skye Dorsey Vasquez made the recent deal with Brown and Powell.

While a business transition is underway, art creatives who are accustomed to trekking to 801 Chase Street for supplies will have to wait just a little longer to walk through Art Thing's doors. Brown and Powell told The Annapolis Times newspaper that it would reopen soon, but first, new plans are on the horizon. Purchasing additional stocked items and making effort to jazz up the place a bit, is underway behind closed doors.

"The business has been in existence for almost 56 years, and it has always been a woman-owned business until now," Brown said. "We will be selling a lot of what the art store already carried which is all different types of art supplies, and books while also adding a few more items like Art Things branded apparel, my own branded spray paint line consisting of eight different colors called "Spitfire Spray" by Art Things, hand crafted candles, resin molds, and more."

Brown is an art guru who makes art relatable to people who appreciate the celebration of local and cultural figures. The muralist installed numerous works of Black icons in Annapolis. Two of his most popular creations are the Carlester Smith mural, located off West Street at Pinkey's West Street Liquors, and the Carr's Beach mural. Anyone who takes a trip to visit MC3 StageOne Lawn at Park Place can find his



Todd Powell, left, and Comacell Brown, right, are the new owners of Art Things in Annapolis. The artist supply store was recently purchased and will reopen soon, after enhancements have been made. The establishment is located inside of Maryland Hall at 801 Chase Street. Powell is a real estate investor and entrepreneur. Brown is a muralist, graphic designer, teaching artist, mentor and CEO of Cell Spitfire Paintings and Designs. He is known for painting popular murals in Annapolis and other states. Powell and Brown acquired the previously woman-owned business. It has been in existence for almost 56 years.

Photo credit – Steve Adams

work there. Brown collaborated on other masterpieces in Orlando, Florida, Harlem, N.Y. and Washington D.C. He specializes in the usage of bright colors, typography, balance of space and abstract backgrounds.

Although the artist is known for displaying his creative depictions in public places, Brown is also a full-time, entrepreneurial spirit who embraces all his skill sets. He is a graphic designer, teaching artist, mentor and CEO of Cell Spitfire Paintings and Designs. Brown's deep appreciation for art dates to the age of six. He began tracing pictures to draw them from memory.

Brown's full immersion of art in his life underscores the value of art in the world around us. Powell is a real estate investor and entrepreneur who was aware of Brown's talent and appreciation for art. Upon learning that Art Things was up for sale, the forward-thinking Annapolitan reached out to Brown to find out if he would be interested in establishing a business partnership.

"We talked in detail and instantly knew we had the same vision for Art Things Annapolis," Powell said. "We could have easily opened a retail store throughout the city, however I was drawn to the history and legacy of the brand and wanted to be the keeper and position it for the next 56 years. We are about the community and (honoring) our desire to engage a new audience to what we're doing and have planned."

Powell noted that reimagining the brand is also on the agenda. This step is inclusive of upgrading tech-

nology used in the space. Adding additional programming, such as events, teaching, hiring interns are other goals which are on the horizon at Art Things.

In addition to patronizing guests who seek in-person, experiential treatment, a robust e-commerce platform is in development. Supplies will also be shipped to customers. A call-to-action fuses moving forward with a spirit of wanting the business to thrive.

"We couldn't and wouldn't want to do this without the community. So, the obvious support would be to purchase (supplies), refer (customers), and attend events offered by Art Things Annapolis along with its brands and divisions," Powell said.

He requested that customers who have patronized the brand for the last 56 years continue to do so. This will enable the new owners to offer an intersection of art and hospitality beyond simply selling art supplies.

Brown added that he wants the public to stay up to date about the reopening of Art Things.

Please follow the social media pages @ArtThingsAnnapolis and @cellspitfire on all social media platforms.

"We will make an announcement prior to opening up. We just ask for the community's patience while we sort through things," Brown said.

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The slap seen around the world is a teachable moment about Black men and mental health

By Paula Penebaker

Being a Black man in America often means being your brother's keeper. Yet, when it comes to mental health, many Black men still struggle to tackle this important issue.

Today, this topic is being discussed more openly since actor Will Smith slapped comedian Chris Rock at the Academy Awards. Just moments later, Smith received his first-ever Oscar win, a milestone overshadowed by his earlier confrontation with Rock. Viewers watched Smith experience a rollercoaster of emotions, including happiness, anger and remorse, within the span of one award show.

Dr. Rahn Bailey, a psychiatrist with the W. Montague Cobb/NMA Health Institute and Department Head of Psychiatry at LSU's School of Medicine, believes this moment highlights the mental health struggles many Black men are grappling with in America.

"Part of the issue is that Black men are not respected and valued at the same level as some other human beings in our society," Dr. Bailey said. "I don't think that would have happened if the comedian was not a Black male. Had he been a woman, I don't think that would have happened. And perhaps had he been a white male, that may not have happened either. It could certainly be those roles are valued more."

Depression remains one of the most common, yet underrecognized and undertreated mental illnesses among Black men, according to the National Institute of Health. Their mental health is more complex than statistics or clinical diagnoses indicate, as they are forced to balance many unspoken pressures, unrealistic expectations and unfair stereotypes.

"But violence, in any form, does more harm than good 99% of the time — other than self-defense," Dr. Bailey said. "And we should be very cautious, initially, when we quickly run to the defense of violence."

The COVID-19 pandemic has only made matters worse. People are facing new and challenging realities: working from home, unemployment, virtual schooling, lack of in-person interactions. Mental health, especially for Black men, is more important today than ever before.

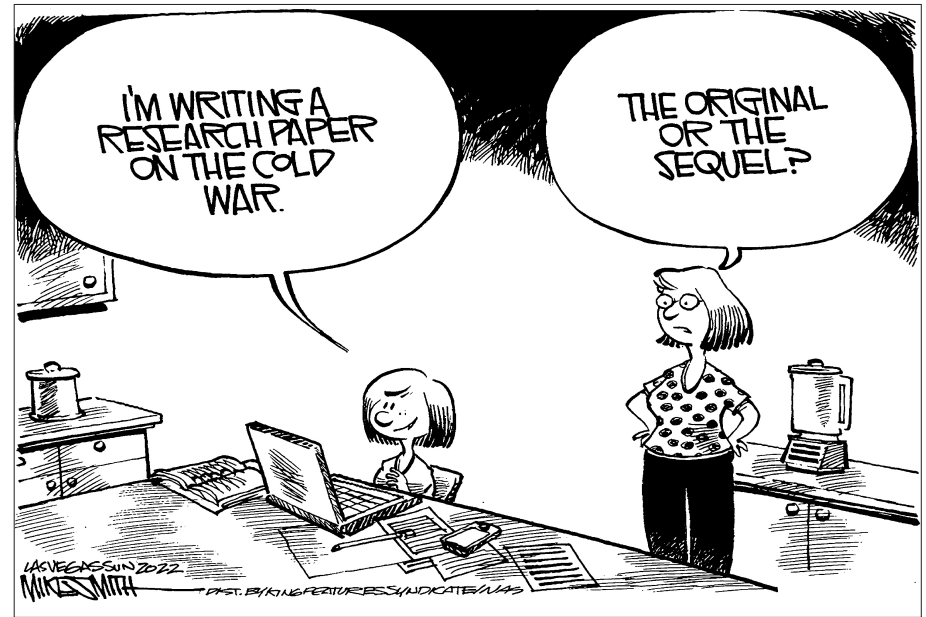
As far as COVID, I think the misinformation our society is exposed to now in the healthcare domain is frightening," Dr. Bailey said. "We have to keep our eye on the ball."

Worrying about COVID-19, coupled with the devastating loss of loved ones, continues to be a mental health stressor.

Whether Black men are on stage, in the board room or on the block, their emotions and state of mind need to be taken seriously. Their mental health matters.

About Dr. Rahn Bailey

Dr. Rahn Bailey is board certified in Psychiatry and Forensic Psychiatry. He is a nationally recognized expert on gun violence, intimate partner violence, health disparities in minority populations and forensic psychiatry. Dr. Bailey has authored and co-authored over 50 peer-reviewed publications, and he has written books about healthcare reform and gun violence. He is excited about returning to LSU School of Medicine, where he began his faculty career.



Community Affairs

Summer programs for grieving children and teens

(PASADENA, MD, April 11, 2022) — Chesapeake Life Center will offer four different summer grief programs for children and teens that are filled with adventure, music and horses.

Rhythm & Grieve is a workshop for elementary-school children ages 6 to 12 that incorporates music to help children express their grief through sound, art, and movement. Kids will start by engaging their bodies through music and yoga. They will then make their own drum to honor their loved ones, creatively express their emotions, and connect with others. Get ready for grief out loud, from 11:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. June 11 at Yoga Barn in Severna Park, Maryland.

Take Flight will take place at the College Park Airport and the Aviation Museum in College Park, Maryland, and is an interactive workshop experience for elementary-school children ages 6 to 12 to explore their grief, make friends, and have a lot of fun! Through art, play, conversations, and support, children will develop new ways that help with the difficult task of grieving, while learning they are not alone. It will be held from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. July 16 and includes an activity in the aviation museum.

Grieving with Horses is a workshop for teens and preteens to spend a day at Maryland Therapeutic Riding in Crownsville, Maryland. Horses are incredibly sensitive to human emotions and their emotional intelligence can be a helpful tool in one's journey through grief. No horse experience is needed and all activities are unmounted. There will be two different days to attend based on age groups. Pre-teens ages 11 to 13 entering sixth to eighth grade can attend from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Aug. 12 while teens ages 13 to 18 entering high school can attend from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Aug. 19. Attendance restrictions and requirements will be updated using the most recent Centers for Disease Control guidelines and organizational policies prior to each event. The cost for each program is \$40, and includes meals, and activities. Scholarships are available; inquire upon registering. Space is limited. Registration is required and on a first-come, first-served basis. You can register by calling 888-501-7077 or emailing griefinfo@chesapeakelifecenter.org. Visit www.hospicechesapeake.org/events for a complete listing of in-person and virtual groups and workshops for adults and children.

5G and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Could Help End the Digital Divide

By Hazel Trice Edney

(TriceEdneyWire.com) - The last two years have underlined what we already knew: the digital divide in America is real and has consequences for millions of Americans. An affordable, reliable connection is imperative in participating in the 21st century economy, and those families relying on mobile-only access are falling behind. Often, they cannot attend class online or seek a career opportunity that offers the possibility of working remotely. And as more services, job applications, and infrastructure moves online, the gap is only widening.

This digital divide is one that crosses geographic, racial, and class lines. More often than not, those living without access to a reliable broadband connection are living in rural areas of our country. In urban areas access is not a problem, but affordability is for many low-income families – a challenge that disproportionately impacts minority communities. Data show that Black and Hispanic adults are less likely than White adults

to have high-speed internet in their home. And while 92 percent of adults who make \$75,000 or more a year say they have broadband at home, that number drops to 57 percent according to those whose annual income is \$30,000 or less.

According to research by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, “Over 7.2 million children in the U.S. live in households without a computer—including over 1.84 million Black children...In the United States, 34 percent of Black adults do not have home broadband, and 30.6% of Black households with one or more children age 17 or younger lack high-speed home internet (over 3.25 million Black chil-

“Over 7.2 million children in the U.S. live in households without a computer—including over 1.84 million Black children...”

dren live in these households).”

Therefore, while it’s great news to see that broadband prices have fallen over the last five years, there are still millions of Americans who can’t afford an internet connection at home. Fortunately, two new developments from the public and private sector can help solve this problem: the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the nationwide rollout of 5G home service.

Closing the digital divide has been an area of key focus for President Biden.

The bipartisan infrastructure package signed into last year contains billions of dollars that aims to tackle not only broadband access, but affordability and adoption. \$14.2 billion of this funding went to the creation of the Affordability Connectivity Program (ACP), which offers a \$30 discount to help lower-income consumers and families pay for internet service. In many cases, internet service providers are offering plans under the ACP which are effectively free, and, to date, over 10 million households have taken advantage of these steep discounts.

The infrastructure bill also provides \$65 billion to help bring broadband to the many unserved and under-served

connection, 5G home is a wireless, rapidly deployable and a cost-effective technology that relies on new, nationwide 5G networks to provide home internet at speeds comparable to cable.

Many people who are living without internet don’t have the luxury of waiting around for a technician for one, let alone two, visits. The ease of use of 5G for home broadband addresses this problem. It relies on the user for a self-installation, with some carriers reporting an average install time that is under an hour.

There are over 2,800 providers of fixed wireless access in the United States today. The number of companies entering the market will significantly increase competition and cause the price of broadband to drop even further. FWA plans are generally priced below cable internet rates and this new competition is a welcome development for low-income families.

The Biden administration’s broadband connectivity goals are intrinsically linked to the successful and widespread rollout of fixed wireless access. We’ve made a historic investment in making broadband affordable through the ACP and in making broadband available to all Americans. This historic investment along with 5G home internet service means a better digital future for all of us regardless of race or income level. An equitable digital future is within reach.

swaths of the country where there is little to no service to be had at any price. States are currently working on developing plans in coordination with the National Telecommunications Information Administration (NTIA) to finally connect those parts of their cities and states that have languished with poor connectivity for decades.

One of the solutions to connect these homes is a new one: 5G for home broadband (also known as fixed wireless access or FWA). Similar to your phone

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Ravens could target edge rusher in 2022 draft

By Tyler Hamilton

The Baltimore Ravens have a long history of outstanding edge rushers ranging from Peter Boulware to Mike McQueary and of course, Terrell Suggs. The position is clearly one that Baltimore places a premium on. That's why they've used recent draft picks to select Jaylon Ferguson, Daelin Hayes and most recently Odafe Oweh.

Ravens general manager Eric DeCosta looked to bolster the edge rusher position by agreeing to terms on a deal to bring Za'Darius Smith back to Baltimore after the Green Bay Packers released him. That deal fell apart and now the Ravens will turn to the draft.

Baltimore holds the No. 14 overall pick and should get a crack at an impact player to chase quarterbacks.

"There are some good players. Typically, those guys go fast. We think there will be a run of those guys, probably in the Top 10. There might be a guy or two that falls down to us at [Pick] 14, potentially," DeCosta said at a pre-draft press conference.

Top players such as Kayvon Thibodaux and Aidan Hutchinson will be long gone by the time the Ravens pick. There are some mock drafts that have Baltimore selecting Florida State pass rusher Jermain Johnson II with their first round pick.

Johnson played one season at Florida State after transferring from Georgia. That one season resulted in an ACC Defensive Player of the Year Award. He tallied 70 total tackles, 12 sacks, two forced fumbles, two pass deflections, and a fumble recovery for a touchdown.

The Reese's Senior Bowl was a coming out party for Johnson. He



Jermaine Johnson II

Courtesy of Icon Sportswire via Getty Images

dominated the one-on-one portion of practice which carries over to team periods during the week. Seeing a player shine during Senior Bowl week is ultra-appealing to the Ravens who have placed an emphasis on selecting players from the annual college all-star event.

Johnson attended the NFL Combine and continued to shine. Running a blazing 4.58 40-yard dash.

Fortunately for Baltimore, this class is deep at pass rusher. Oweh was last year's first-round pick out of Penn State. Another Penn State's pass rusher, Arnold Ebiketie could be an option for the Ravens in the second round.

"There are guys in the second, third and fourth rounds that we're kind of lucky that we have the chance to look at some different players, meaning potentially some of these undersized 4-3 defensive ends really do fit us as outside linebackers. Our coaches are, right now, looking at those guys, scouring the country, going to workouts, going to Pro Days, and we'll have a good strong board."

Then there's the wildcard.

Baltimore has 10 picks this year, including four in the first three rounds. They can afford to take a flyer on Michigan pass rusher David Ojabo.

Ojabo blossomed into a first-round talent in one season as a starter at Michigan. He finished

with 12 tackles for a loss, 11 sacks and five forced fumbles. Unfortunately, he tore his Achilles during Michigan's pro day.

The injury will likely cost him most of the 2022 season. But there's a chance he could reward a team that selects him.

"Unfortunately, one of the top guys and really an outstanding prospect, [David] Ojabo suffered an injury, which was unfortunate for us, unfortunate for the league and certainly most unfortunate for him," DeCosta said.

"With that being said, he suffered an Achilles. He should be back, and he should be ready to go. He's a tremendous talent. You all saw what he did at Michigan this year opposite [Aidan] Hutchinson."

There will be opportunities to bolster the pass rush. The question is, will the Ravens pick the right one.

VISIT BALTIMORE PUBLIC HEARING ON THE BALTIMORE TOURISM IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT FISCAL YEAR 2022-2023 FINANCIAL PLAN

The District Management Committee of Visit Baltimore will meet on Thursday, April 21, 2022, at 11:00 AM at a virtual public meeting hosted by Visit Baltimore to conduct a public hearing on the Baltimore Tourism Improvement District (BTID) FY2022-23 Financial Plan. The public hearing is a requirement of Article II, §70 of the Baltimore City Charter, and Article 14, §20 of the Baltimore City Code. At the public virtual hearing, the District Management Committee will review the BTID FY2022-23 Financial Plan for approval. The BTID FY2022-23 Financial Plan includes the proposed budget and BTID special assessments to be levied on any "Hotel" as defined in City Code Article 28, §21-1(c). The FY2022-23 Financial Plan will also outline proposed services to be provided by the BTID. If approved, the FY2022-23 Financial Plan will be submitted to Baltimore City Board of Estimates for final approval. The public hearing will allow for public comment on the FY2022-23 Financial Plan.

For more information and registration link contact: Mia Blom, Visit Baltimore's Director of Government & Community Affairs at 410-659-8373 or mblom@baltimore.org

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Morgan Grad Pens 'A Girl In A Museum World'

Book Seeks to Inspire Kids To Take Charge of Their History

By Ursula V. Battle

Tellie Simpson recalled visiting the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, DC as a young child.

"I was always an inquisitive child," recalled Simpson. "I remember going to the museum and seeing a lady who worked there clinging to one of the artifacts. I was so fascinated."

The experience would pique Simpson's interest in the museum world. She would grow up to earn an M.A. in Museum Studies and a B.A. in History from Morgan State University, and pursue a career working in the field. Now, Tellie Simpson is "telling" her unique experiences through her new book, "A Girl In A Museum World". Simpson says through the book, she seeks to motivate kids to take charge of their history and follow their dreams.

"I've been in the museum field for quite a while," said the 28-year-

old. "Sadly, it was the lack of diversity that motivated me to write the book. I wanted to shed some light on the lack of diversity in the field. I also wanted to strike the curiosity of young readers' minds early and to get them thinking about history and art museums."

She added, "Another goal was to crack the excesses for both kids and adults. I want the book to resonate with anyone who picks it up."

"A Girl In A Museum World" allows readers to

take a trip to the museum through the book's main character, "Sophia," who decides to make her history matter. The book follows the curious munchkin on a day at the museum.

"Sophia is a lot like me," said Simpson who is also an avid collector. "I was a very curious child. I also hope the book inspires kids to draw and take it seriously."

The book launched April 2022, and includes illustrations by Morgan Jennings. Simpson said "A Girl In A Museum World" has received positive feedback from parents



Tellie Simpson, pictured. Tellie Simpson is the author of A Girl In A Museum World. The 28-year-old Morgan State University graduate seeks to motivate young readers to take charge of their history and follow their dreams. (Courtesy Photo)



A Girl In A Museum World Artwork (Artwork Courtesy of Tellie Simpson)

and young readers. The Baltimore native said the book is a first in a series, with the next edition coming out next year.

Simpson said her life's full circle moment came when she was hired by the Smithsonian Institution—the place that started "her-story" in the museum world. Located in Washington, DC, The Smithsonian Institution is the world's largest museum, education, and research complex.

Simpson's employment also includes working for South Carolina State Museum. Located in Columbia, South Carolina, the South Carolina State Museum seeks to

provide educational environments that entertain, inspire imagination and creativity, and enrich the lives of visitors.

Simpson said she plans to continue publishing books and spread her love of history, museums, art, and culture.

"This project is dedicated to every door that was closed," said Simpson. "I wanted every page of this book to be impactful."

For more information about Girl In A Museum World or to purchase copies, visit girlinamuseumworld.com

Annapolitan Continues Easter Traditions, Promotes Community Togetherness

By Andrea Blackstone

Ashley Ballinger is an Annapolitan who fondly recalls dying Easter eggs at home with her older sister, Takia Williams. The pair grew up in the nineties embracing Easter traditions in Wanda Evans' household. Ballinger and Williams became accustomed to wearing Easter hats and pretty dresses to church. Adventurous Easter egg hunts followed. The Easter family tradition commenced with their maternal grandmother, Dorethea Evans.

In time, Ballinger began to look forward to an additional Easter stop. She began attending a kiddie disco at the American Legion on Forest Drive with her father, Jeffrey McGhee. Ashley's cousins joined in the fun to receive Easter baskets, hunt for Easter eggs outdoors on Easter Day, and just dance!

"The dance contest and best dressed contest was a hit," Ballinger said reminiscing.

Today, the owner of Events By Ashley B, LLC has not lost the desire to merge the meaning behind Easter—which celebrates Jesus Christ's resurrection after crucifixion—with childhood joy. Ballinger is known for creating memories by utilizing her event planning talents. She sponsored a free, fun-filled Easter celebration on April 10, 2022 in Annapolis. Ballinger invited families to celebrate the Easter holiday before its arrival on April 17. The 2022 Easter egg hunt featured activities such as dying



*Children enjoy a sack race during Ashley Ballinger's community event.
Photo courtesy of Ashley B, LLC*

eggs; participating in a potato sack race; trying out an egg and spoon race; writing with sidewalk chalk; coloring Easter sheets; and searching for a golden egg.

"The event was held at Annapolis Walk Recreation Center in Annapolis," Ballinger said, noting that it took place in indoor and outdoor spaces. "The children came excited and ready to participate for the hunt. It was so nice to see them all engage in the activities as they had a great time!"

Approximately 60 people showed up for the Easter festivities, according to Ballinger. The successful turnout made purchasing and toting loads of plastic eggs, Easter grass, small toys, food, and beverages well worth the effort.

Ballinger is no stranger to volunteering in her hometown of Annapolis. She previously sponsored back to school events, distributed

Thanksgiving dinner baskets, and coat drives, before and during the pandemic. The Easter event was yet one more chance to get involved in spreading cheer. The entrepreneur covered the cost of the Easter event by using funds that she generated from her small business. Although donations were unsolicited, the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development sponsored items.

"Giving back to the community

was a way for me to show families that we can still celebrate for the holidays," Ballinger said. "I know that the pandemic has made it difficult for gatherings but there are a lot of ways to celebrate special moments. Continue to make it meaningful and memorable!"

Stephanie Jones hails from the Annapolis area. She brought two children to Ballinger's latest event. She is a fan of attending her events and supporting Ballinger.

"Ashley is really amazing," Jones said, naming all the thoughtful things Ballinger does in the community. "She's always been a joy to be around."

Jones enjoyed the good times she was able to experience at the Easter event. She mentioned how hard she laughed during the exciting sack race.

Ballinger accomplished her

goal of ensuring that community members and their children like Jones' family could laugh off a bit of pandemic stress and come together like old times in Annapolis, when small town charm often brought people together. People like Ballinger remind that even in tough times, having fun can still work wonders. No matter where people

reside, bringing the community together builds generational bonds and generational traditions.



*Two-year-old, Kevin Howard, Jr. spends time with the Easter bunny
Photo courtesy of Ashley B, LLC*

How One Teen CEO is Changing the Voice of News Through Her Own Podcast

By Andrea Blackstone

Sydney Chandler Monet' Collins—who has been the voice behind Perfect Timing Podcast since 2020—pushed the pandemic's limits aside with a smile to make the world a better place. At just 17 years old, the Southern Maryland honor student brings people together through her podcast called the Perfect Timing. When she is not speaking into a microphone, Sydney balances a 7-year commitment to dancing with the Washington Ballet, motivational speaking, philanthropy work, contributing author endeavors, producing, and a budding interest in politics. The future leader serves as a reminder that work should be purpose-filled, rewarding, and enjoyable.

Sydney founded a non-profit organization called Live Your Future Educated (LYFE) to encourage youth to read books, build confidence, and social skills, when she was 12. The pandemic presented

Sydney Chandler Monet' Collins is the voice of Perfect Timing Podcast. The 17-year-old founder and CEO from Md. created a nonprofit business to allow young people to be heard through the platform.

Photo credit : Lindria Dockett



an opportunity to create a non-profit business. The Perfect Timing Podcast allows young people to experience a place where they can feel safe, empowered, and heard.

“My podcast became my passion when my mom (Yvette Harris-Collins) challenged me to do something that gives back to the community. And once I saw the feedback and how much I actually do enjoy hosting interviews and meeting all these people..., it really was just something that I looked forward to doing every time I recorded every

week. And the feedback from it has been amazing. And so, it's only pushed me to keep going with it,” Sydney said. “I just wanted to be a role model and set the example for kids who don't feel like they have a safe space to talk, or they feel like their ideas are inadequate or that their voice is valid.”

Perfect Timing guests typically include actors or actresses, authors, friends, entrepreneurs, and occasionally, adult experts who hail from various fields. The show allows youth to discuss their dreams, ambitions, and ideas. Sydney has interviewed everyone from Christian “The Truth” Jones—who is a teenage CEO, day trader investor, and award-winning certified Les

Brown speaker—to Brigadier General Janeen Birkhead. Brandi Harvey, who is the daughter of comedian Steve Harvey, is an American executive and activist. She was another one of Sydney's notable show guests.

Sharing news allows the Sydney to educate other young people, in addition to older generations about what is occurring in the world, through the art of conversation. “It makes me feel like... my voice has an impact,” Sydney said. “If I hadn't said anything, I wouldn't have gotten the exposure that I have. I wouldn't have changed the ideas and minds of people that I originally may not have done.”

As the world begins to open to in-person events, the eleventh grader can be spotted on the speaking scene, even in Baltimore. On March 26, 2022, the teenager made an appearance at the Residence Inn by Marriott to support underserved girls in the community, through the Girls Who Brunch Tour. The event was presented by Steve & Marjorie Harvey Foundation. Local organizations brought young girls to the event which included workshops and speakers.

“I facilitated a workshop called “Your Purpose is Greater Than Your Fear,” where I talked to a group of 12–14-year-old girls about how to identify their fear, establish self-worth, find their purpose, and take the steps to make it happen,” Sydney said. “I was able to have an open conversation with the girls about their experiences with fear, self-hatred, and personal revelations.”

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Workshop - Sydney Chandler Monet' Collins speaks to other youth while facilitating a “Your Purpose is Greater Than Your Fear” workshop in Baltimore, Md. Photo credit: Yvette Harris-Collins



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Baggage is Heavy, Pack Light



By Nikki Abraham

I used to have a terrible habit of trying to fit my entire wardrobe in my luggage when packing for a trip. At the end of the excursion, I always come to realize that carrying all the heavy luggage was unnecessary. Packing light is the most rewarding feeling because you have all the essentials and options you feel good about without the burden of the extra weight. As you experience obstacles in your lifetime you will come to understand that life is the longest journey you'll ever take, and you're not meant to carry everything with you along the way.

Emotional baggage is a term used to describe carrying trauma or negative experience with you through life whether it's in your career, relationships. We all travel through life with this baggage that may have caused a significant emotional reaction within you. It's important to realize these experiences continue to shape who you are, your thoughts, and the choices you make. Take a second and ask yourself if your emotional baggage is holding you back. Taking the time to identify and understand our

baggage and making a conscious decision to let go, we free ourselves to experience life in a richer, deeper, more meaningful way.

A pro tip when packing is to plan out your outfits ahead of time. Having an idea of what you will wear throughout the trip will ultimately eliminate confusion when you arrive at your destination. Having too many options, listening to opinions of everyone, and not having tunnel vision will fog your view and limit clarity. Holding on to unimportant details instead of focusing on things that matter can distract us from having the best possible behavior and the opportunity to learn from mistakes as well as achievements.

A good way to start addressing your baggage is to have a reality check with yourself. What baggage is weighing you down? What are you willing to let go of? As you unpack, it's also important to understand that none of our minimizing journeys look the same as the loads we all carry are different.

Sometimes baggage stays in your life because you never let yourself deal with it. The longer you wait to deal with your baggage the more

cumbersome it becomes. Acceptance is the most important part of letting go and setting yourself free. Give yourself grace as you courageously confront the junk weighing you down. Come face to face with the trauma affecting your life and learn to release.

Learning to let go is easier said than done. It takes time, practice, patience, and mindfulness. Don't feel bad about asking for help. Seeing a therapist can help you tackle some major life issues, and a licensed professional can be the key to helping you unload. As a first step of letting go, ask yourself what you learned from a negative situation and draw a lesson from it that you can implement in your daily life moving forward. What is the new commitment you are making and how do you care for yourself now, so you do better in the future?

Carrying heavy baggage will ultimately pigeonhole you from maximizing your full potential. Having a positive outlook as you go through this whole process can also be super helpful. Start to reevaluate all the things weighing you down and learn to pack light.



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Teen CEO

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Behind every successful child, a support system at home is usually not far behind. David Collins is Sydnie's supportive father. Harris-Collins, who is a mother of six, referred to her husband as "the silent partner." She explained that David takes up the slack to enable their other children to be where they need to be, in addition to being supportive of Sydnie, when demands call for his presence.

Harris-Collins and Sydnie illustrate that the pandemic offers a perfect time to embrace new ideas and implement goals. A brainstorming session held when the world became tangled in crisis led the pair to brainstorm and bring the Perfect Timing to life. Sydnie's informative show ended up ranking number two out of 40 podcast shows within the Elite Conversations platform. Harris-Collins lends a hand with Sydnie's emails, prospective opportunities, meetings, and scheduling. She reminded that finding sponsors and receiving monetary donations would help Sydnie purchase better equipment. However, simply commenting on podcast episodes, and providing feedback encourages her future leader to keep sharing news and information with the community.

"Even though it's difficult for everybody in the pandemic, it's given an opportunity to be open without being stuck in a box," Harris-Collins said.

Please visit <https://bit.ly/PerfectTimingPodcast> to learn more about the Perfect Timing Podcast. Follow the platform for youth via <https://www.facebook.com/perfecttimingyouthpodcast>.



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The MLK Parade & African Diaspora Festival Returns to Annapolis, Draws a Substantial Crowd

By Andrea Blackstone

Annapolis-based, community events are bouncing back strong, despite the pandemic. Add the MLK Parade & African Diaspora Festival to the list of cultural happenings which garnered substantial support, after COVID interrupted a festive flow. According to organizers, up to 5,000 people showed up on Saturday, April 2, 2022, to celebrate Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s life and legacy. The celebration kicked off with a parade. The route began at Amos Garrett Blvd. and ended at the City Dock.

Syncopate drumming filled the streets as pom poms shook and whistles blared. "Fweet!"

Josephine Brown, a native Annapolitan who currently resides in Bowie, Maryland, played a substantial role in reinvigorating Annapolis with a renewed festive vibe. Brown served as chairman of the MLK Parade. After the parade ceased, music, food, activities for kids, vendors selling items, and various activities unfolded at Susan B. Campbell Park. Go-go bands and other musical acts cranked tunes, including celebrity funkster, Gregory "Sugar Bear" Elliot who is widely known as a founding band member of Experience Unlimited E.U.

The spirit of unity was embedded in fun event. Brown teamed up with Adetola Ajayi—an Annapolitan who works as the African



Del. Dana Jones, center, waves at the crowd. Speaker of the Maryland House of Delegates, Adrienne A. Jones, who served as the MLK Parade's Grand Marshal, walks alongside her. Maryland Del. Shaneka Henson smiles while walking the parade route with various officials. Courtesy of The City of Annapolis

American Community Services Specialist for the City of Annapolis. Ajayi was the other organizer and co-chairman to Brown who added the African Diaspora Festival as a post-parade activity. Officials were included in the collaborative lineup, including Delegate Adrienne Jones. She served as the parade's grand marshal. Annapolis Mayor, Gavin Buckley also made a parade appearance. The City of Annapolis co-sponsored the lively day.

Brown explained that the previous MLK parade schedule led to postponements, due to cold weather in January. It will now permanently be held the first week in April, around the time King was assassinated.

"We're still commemorating his legacy and life," Brown said, highlighting the importance of collaboration. "The one thing I can say

is that when we work together, we all succeed. We do well, when we come together. Everything doesn't always have to be separate. Adetola and I worked together. He worked just as hard on the parade as I did on the festival. It was a joint venture. It was no separation between the parade and festival."

Brown credited Priscilla Montague, the founder and director of the Annapolis Drum and Bugle Corps, as the visionary who started the MLK Parade tradition in Annapolis. It paused for

several years, due to the pandemic. Additionally, the origin of the African Diaspora Festival dates back to 2019, but COVID interrupted that, too.

"When I started working with the city (of Annapolis), I wanted to bring that festival into my work, and...bring it at the city as a partner," Ajayi said, mentioning that he wanted to establish it as a program.

In 2017, the first event which he organized with Black Wall Street Maryland at the Stanton Center. It was hosted by Darius Stanton. By 2019, the idea to merge the MLK Parade with it evolved. Most recently, Brown reached out to start planning while Ajayi tackled other components of commemorating the life and legacy of Dr. King and illustrate that the Black African diaspora exists in Annapolis.

Inclusion of music and art was an important piece in inspiring people to come to enjoy the day.

"One of the main things, core things I would say... or the vision that I had was just unity in our community, and particularly in our city," Ajayi said, underscoring the idea that Black people can successfully

combine forces. "So I just think Black people can work together is the message."



Adetola Ajayi, left, partnered with Josephine Brown, right. The pair worked together as event organizers. Photo Credit – Robert McKinzie

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