

The Annapolis Times

Vol. 37 No. 40

August 11 - 17, 2023

A Baltimore Times/Times of Baltimore Publication

Entrepreneur Seeks to Inspire Other Deaf Individuals, Finds Afrotika



(L-R) A collage created by Abiola Haroun, made of African fabrics and printed media. Born deaf, Abiola Haroun is the owner of Afrotika, which sells African-inspired art, clothing and accessories created by Haroun. She created the dress she is wearing, which is made of tie and dye cotton fabric imported from Africa. (See article on page 8) Photos Courtesy of Abiola Haroun

Female Students Gain STEM Career Insight During Empowering STEM Academy

By Andrea Blackstone

When it comes to fun and safe overnight summer camps for children, opportunities to attend one can be a pricey prospect for parents.

A no-cost Exelon Foundation STEM Academy was underway at the University of Maryland College Park from Monday, July 31 – Friday, Aug. 4, 2023, compliments of The Exelon Foundation and Baltimore Gas and Electric Company (BGE). Lodging and meals were provided during the in-person, immersive experience that integrated a camp feel.

“We brought together over 60 local female high school students from across the Maryland and DC areas to stay on campus for a week and engage in hands-on learning activities, field trips and networking opportunities with professionals from Exelon and BGE. We also had STEM Academies in Chicago and Philadelphia, each also with 60 girls, before this one,” said Paula Conrad, president, Exelon Foundation.

Exelon, a Fortune 250 company and the nation’s largest utility company, serves customers through six fully regulated transmission and distribution utilities, including Baltimore Gas and Electric.

Conrad further explained that the partnership with BGE evolved to provide young women in high school with hands-on experience in STEM, energy, and sustainability.

“With our 2023 Academies complete, we are so excited to have reached a milestone of 1,000 young women having participated in the past six years in STEM Academy in Chicago, Philadelphia and Baltimore/DC,” Conrad said.

STEM Academy graduates are also invited to apply for a college scholarship from the Exelon Foundation, if they opt to pursue degrees in engineering, IT or business/finance. Additionally, scholarship winners are encouraged to intern with Exelon, BGE and other utilities. Exelon hopes to employ a portion of previous winners, when they graduate from college, according to Conrad.

Violette Wood, a 16-year-old Baltimore Polytechnic Institute student from Baltimore, Maryland, gained STEM career insight while attending the STEM Academy. Making a parallel circuit that lit four lights was among her favorite activities.

“Though I attend a STEM school, this was my first actual STEM camp. I absolutely loved my experience here,” Violette said. “Participating in



Kemisola Benson makes a circuit.
Photo credit: Sean Allen

the Exelon Foundation STEM Leadership Academy has been my first real-world exposure to the field of renewable energy.”

The rising high school junior also had the opportunity to speak to a few academy staff members who earned degrees in her career fields of interest. Rodney Oddoye, Exelon's Senior Vice President of Governmental, Regulatory, and External Affairs of Pepco Holdings was among them.

“It was great talking to him and hearing his goals for increased coordination between energy professionals and policymakers to enact change, because that's exactly what I hope to do in my career,” Violette said.

This year’s STEM Academy focused on issues related to the critical state of the climate crisis.

Teams of students identified a problem, designed solutions with technology and materials and presented their proposed solutions to a panel of judges on Friday, Aug. 4, 2023 during a final challenge. BGE and Exelon employees served as judges for student projects.

PIPE (Power in Pink Electric), the winning team of the final challenge, addressed power outages caused by extreme heat in Marcus Hook, a borough that is located in Philadelphia. The proposed solution entailed introducing hydroelectric facilities to reduce the energy burden and bring increased energy during heat waves.

Seventeen-year-old Kemisola Benson, a rising high school senior who attends College Park Academy, located in Prince George’s County, Maryland also participated in the unique STEM Academy.

“When I grow up, I want to be a chemist or chemical engineer who concentrates on solving problems in the energy industry,” Kemisola said.

The ambitious student “had plenty of opportunities to meet with like-minded girls” with whom she could make peer connections.

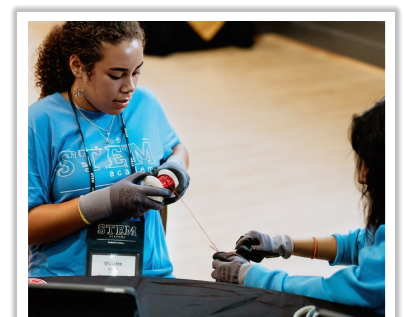
“I definitely plan to keep in touch with the people I’ve met,” Kemisola said.

She added, “Exelon and BGE truly changed my life in these past six days. The program gave me so many opportunities to see the “finish line” of what I want to become in life and genuinely realize all of it is possible. It opened a lot of doors into people and places I’d never get to see on the traditional school route.”

More high school girls who will be rising juniors and seniors in the summer may apply for the STEM Academy, in the future. Young women must hail from specific geographical locations to apply, including Washington, D.C.; Baltimore City; Anne Arundel; Baltimore; Caroline; Carroll; Cecil; Dorchester; Harford; Howard; Kent; Montgomery; Prince Georges; Wicomico; and Worcester Counties in Maryland. An application opens at the beginning of the year. Visit www.exelonstemacademy.org to obtain details.



(L-R) Team Power in Pink Electric's members, Excellence Aregbesola; Kaiden Brown; Montana Smith; and Emma Laviolette comprised the winning team that tackled an extreme heat problem.
Photo credit: Sean Allen



Violette Wood works on winding wire to make a model of a transformer with her group.
Photo credit: Sean Allen

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By the Numbers: "William Lloyd, 'Little Willie' Adams, Prominent Venture Capitalist"

By Regi Taylor, Editorial Page Editor

At the end of his 97-year-old life, "Little Willie," who made his initial fortune as a "Numbers" kingpin, illegal lottery proprietor, in Baltimore, was fêted in a Baltimore Sun obituary headlined "William Lloyd 'Little Willie' Adams, Prominent Venture Capitalist." This honor is in stark contrast to Adams' detractors who preferred to recognize him as a notorious gangster holding court in West Baltimore.

In consideration of Black Business Month, the impact Little Willie Adams had on the development and expansion of African American entrepreneurship in Baltimore is unparalleled. By the time of his death, June 28, 2011, Adams, who arrived in Baltimore uneducated and penniless at age 15 in 1929 and at the start of the Great Depression, amassed a personal worth potentially valued at hundreds of millions of dollars.

A Wikipedia citation estimates Little Willie's net worth in the 1970's at \$40 million, equivalent to roughly \$275 million today, a phenomenal accomplishment for a former teenaged sharecropper whose first job after arriving in Baltimore was working 55 hours per week at a waterfront rag shop for \$6 a week. Born January 5, 1914, Willie Adams left his grandfather in Zebulon, North Carolina, population approximately 500, arriving at his aunt and uncle's home on North Bond Street in 1929.

Ambitious and hardworking, Willie delivered newspapers, operated a shoeshine parlor and repaired bicycles. Recognizing Adams' drive and aptitude, the bike repair shop owner, Johnny Wiggins, introduced Little Willie to The Six and Eight Company headed by George Goldberg, the dominant illegal numbers operator in East Baltimore. Proving himself a shrewd, well-

organized operative, Willie graduated from running numbers to head his own numbers bank by 16-years-old.

He was still a juvenile when Little Willie Adams began to demonstrate his prowess as a "venture capitalist." It would become clear later in his life that it was never Adams' ambition to become a career "criminal." At a time when Jim Crow prohibited African Americans from borrowing from banks, compounded by a national economic depression with a 50 - 60 percent Black unemployment rate, intellectually astute, enterprising Black men like Adams recognized the numbers game as a means to build an economy in Black inner cities where none otherwise existed.

In a 1979 newspaper interview Little Willie Adams explained that "I only used [the numbers] as a means to get into legitimate business." Twenty-eight years earlier, 1951, testifying before the U.S. Senate Kefauver Committee, the Senate Special Committee to Investigate Crime in Interstate Commerce, Adams was similarly matter-of-fact when he testified on Capitol Hill that he had retired from the illegal numbers business earlier that year, investing the proceeds into a range of legitimate businesses.

To gauge the status the U.S. government conferred upon Little Willie Adams as an organized crime power broker, consider the notorious Italian mafia chieftains summoned to appear before the tribunal besides Willie: Tony "Joe Batters" Accardo, Louis "Little New York" Campagna, Mickey Cohen, Willie Moretti, Frank Costello, and Meyer Lansky. Adams' admission to Congress that he personally earned about \$1,000 per day \$12,600 per day in current money triggered an IRS investigation that convicted him of tax evasion.

Adams appealed and prevailed before the U.S. Supreme Court.

Not only was Little Willie Adams discreet and selective in his business dealings, he was also very low key in his friendships with high profile celebrities and the politically powerful. Willie was close friends and golfing buddies with former heavyweight boxing champion, Joe Louis, and the first Black player accepted into major league baseball, Jackie Robinson. Adams bankrolled and promoted a soft drink for his boxing pal called Joe Louis PUNCH SODA POP! which was not well-received.

However, among Little Willie Adams many successful business ventures financed with proceeds from his illegal numbers profits are several that older Baltimoreans might recognize: Little Willie's Inn, Druid Hill Avenue and Whitelock Streets, 1935; Adams Realty Brokers, 1500 block of Pennsylvania

Ave, 1940; Carr's Beach live entertainment resort, Annapolis, 1944; The Charm Centre, upscale women's dresses, Pennsylvania Avenue, 1946; The Parks Sausage Company, 1951, co-owned with Henry G. Parks Jr. located at Park Circle; Super Fresh Supermarkets, 1970; A & R (Adams & Rodgers) Development Corp., co-owned with former Parks Sausage executive and current chairman and CEO Theo C. Rodgers, 1977.

Adams owned many other Baltimore businesses including night clubs, bars, liquor stores and mortuaries. Besides businesses that bore his name, Willie Adams bankrolled and co-owned many Black-owned Baltimore businesses in deals that were done anonymously. He also financed the campaigns of many local politicians and activists, fundraised for the NAACP and supported workers striking against employment discrimination.



*Little Willie developed and financed Joe Louis PUNCH SODA POP! for his close friend, The Champ
Photo courtesy of Wunderporium Vintage Treasures
https://www.etsy.com/shop/Wunderporium?ref=nla_listing_details*

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The Baltimore Times,
2530 N. Charles Street, Suite 201,
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OP-ED

Why I Am Fighting for Greater Visibility for Diabetic Men and Women

By Patti LaBelle



Patti LaBelle
Photo courtesy of nnpa.org

More than 25 years ago, I collapsed onstage while performing. I had no idea what was happening, but that night in the hospital, when I was diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes, my life was forever changed.

At first, I was angry, and I was terrified. I watched my aunt and uncle lose their sight, and my mother lost both her legs before she died in her 60s due to diabetes. I know firsthand the toll that this disease can take. It took me a while to do something about my diabetes. I was in denial. I kept my old unhealthy eating habits. If it was battered or fried, I ate it!

Eventually, I realized my glucose levels weren't getting any better, and I knew it was time to do something. I made a conscious choice to prioritize my health and change my way of living. I turned to my love of cooking to overhaul my diet. It meant I had to put

down the butter and pick up the vegetable steamer. I would even take my pots and pans with me on tour and cook in my suite with ingredients from the local farmer's market, just so I could better control my food intake.

Has it been easy? No. But has it paid off? Absolutely.

Black People and Diabetes

The more attention I pay to my health, the better I feel. Exercise and I are not friends, but I started becoming more active – whether walking my dog and exercising in my pool or hopping on the elliptical machine. I use my Dexcom continuous glucose monitor (or CGM) to stay on top of my glucose levels throughout the day, without the need for painful finger pricks. It lets me know where my glucose levels are and where they're headed, all with a glance at my iPhone. I can even share my levels with members of my family and my physician so they can keep a close eye on them, too.

I am proud of how far I have come on my health journey, and I am blessed and privileged to have an incredible support system in my doctors, family and friends. But millions of Americans in this country are not as fortunate.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 1 in 10 Americans have diabetes (34 million), and approximately 90% of them have Type 2 diabetes.

Black people are 60 percent more likely to develop diabetes than white people, and in 2018, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services found that Black people were twice as likely as white people to die from diabetes.

Lots of things are making this true, but it doesn't have to be this way.

Living with diabetes has never been easier; insulin pumps talk directly to continuous glucose monitors and automatically deliver insulin, and you

can keep a close eye on your glucose levels from your smartwatch or phone without pricking your finger – no one likes to do that!

But this amazing technology is still not in the hands of people in Black communities and communities of color. A recent survey of people with insulin-treated diabetes found that most believe they deserve new technology to manage their disease, and I couldn't agree more.

Why are so many of us out here fighting diabetes with the same old tools that have been around since my aunt, uncle and mother were diagnosed? If today's health care system provided more coverage for (and access to) these technologies, millions of lives could be saved.

A 'Divabetic' Advocating for Others

Diabetes is often invisible to everyone except those living with it, and for too long, minorities have felt invisible in this country. They deserve to feel seen and heard. I am proof that you can not only live with Type 2 diabetes but also live well with it. I am not a diabetic, I'm a divabetic! And I am proud of it. That is why this November, along with the Global Movement for Time in Range, I am sharing my story to amplify this important topic, and advocating for better access to diabetes technology and asking that decision-makers take action for communities of color to receive the care they need.

Whether you have Type 1 or Type 2 diabetes, care for someone with diabetes, or you simply believe that people with diabetes deserve better, you can take action too by joining the conversation at wheninrange.com.

It's time that we all truly #SeeDiabetes, because we can't help change what we cannot see.

Patti LaBelle is a singer, actress, author and advocate. Follow her on Twitter: @MsPattiPatti



Skin Deep: Breaking Barriers to a Lifetime of Black Skin Wellness - Eczema

By Jayne Hopson



Jayne Hopson
Courtesy Photo

Considering that the skin is our largest organ, it is not surprising that at some point in life you may need care for a dermatological condition. From “cradle cap” to eczema to acne to dandruff to psoriasis, prompt, proper diagnosis and treatment are essential for a lifetime of healthy skin.

This is especially true for people of color who suffer from dermatological conditions in greater numbers than white patients. There are several illnesses that fall into the increased risk category. Included is eczema, which may occur at any age, and can be triggered by mental stress and environmental hazards found in underserved communities.

As with many acute illnesses, successful treatment requires early, precise diagnosis. However, a correct diagnosis can be limited by a doctor’s capacity for identifying skin conditions they rarely see or treat. This highlights the need to significantly increase the number of Black dermatologists, who through personal and professional experience have a

keener awareness of the unique healthcare needs of dark-skinned patients.

Unfortunately, this sound, straightforward way to address a persistent ethnic/cultural barrier to treatment, is hindered by the astoundingly low number of Black dermatologists. “More than 13 percent of the U.S. population is made of people who identify as Black or African American — but only about 3 percent of U.S. dermatologists consider themselves a person of color,” according to a 2016 report published in the Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD).

For African Americans this means, “a wide swath of Black patients is not always getting proper care for their skin, hair, and nail conditions,” says the ADD. The lack of Black providers notwithstanding, the Academy recommends adults should go to the dermatologist at least once a year to maintain the optimum health of your skin, especially since darker skin tones can suffer from skin ailments presented differently than Caucasians.

Increasing the number of Black providers will require Baltimore City’s two medical colleges to implement a formalized strategy for recruiting medical students of color to specialize in dermatology. This critical shortage could be kickstarted with a grassroots awareness campaign led by patients and community healthcare stakeholders.

“Skin Deep,” a series of future articles on the challenges of skin conditions and food allergies frequently found in communities of

color, begins this week with a closer look at childhood eczema.

Eczema, also known as atopic dermatitis, is a chronic inflammatory skin condition that can affect people of all ages and ethnic backgrounds. However, the ADD, states “research has indicated that Black children may be more susceptible to the condition.” The health and advocacy organization advises the following factors can contribute to the higher incidence of eczema among Black children:

occurrence of eczema among different racial groups.

- **Socioeconomic factors:** Socioeconomic status can also play a role in the development and management of eczema. Access to healthcare, hygiene practices, and living conditions can impact the severity and prevalence of eczema.
- **Skin characteristics:** Skin physiology varies among different racial and ethnic groups. Black skin is often more susceptible to certain skin conditions, including eczema, due to differences in structure and function compared to other skin types.

There is also a mental health component to childhood eczema. According to the American Eczema Association, research suggests children with eczema have higher rates of depression and anxiety. “They are more likely to experience bullying in school and depression because of activity restrictions due to the disease.”

Back to School Tip: It is a good idea to discuss your child’s eczema diagnosis with the teacher at the start of the school year. To help the teacher make your child’s school experience as normal as possible, set up a meeting to discuss your child’s eczema and what you have learned about coping with the disease. A teacher who is familiar with eczema can help your child manage the practical aspects of the condition and respond with any social or emotional issues that may arise in the classroom.



Photo credit: Shutterstock.com

- **Genetic predisposition:** Genetic factors play a significant role in the development of eczema. Certain gene variants may be more common in specific racial or ethnic groups, leading to a higher risk of eczema in those populations.
- **Environmental factors:** Environmental factors, such as climate, pollution, and allergens, can influence the prevalence of eczema. Different regions may have varying levels of these factors, which could affect the



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Entrepreneur Seeks to Inspire Other Deaf Individuals, Founds Afrotika

By Ursula V. Battle

Amidst the many challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic also came the opportunity for aspiring entrepreneurs to devise creative ways to utilize and showcase their talents while generating income. Contemporary artist and fashion designer Abiola Haroun was among them. Profoundly deaf, the West African native says her company,



Born deaf, Abiola Haroun is the owner of Afrotika, which sells African-inspired art, clothing and accessories created by Haroun. She created the dress she is wearing, which is made of tie and dye cotton fabric imported from Africa. Photo Courtesy of Abiola Haroun

Afrotika, fully came to fruition in 2020.

“During the pandemic, I had lots of free time due to being secluded and also working remotely,” said Haroun. “This allowed me to sit down and reflect on the things I wanted to do and had never done due to lack of time. Throughout the pandemic, I created multiple pieces of artwork and clothing. I was amazed at how much one can accomplish if given the time. The pandemic taught me how to use my time effectively. I was able to

filter out the activities that were time wasters and focus on being productive.”

Based in Baltimore, Afrotika sells African-inspired art, clothing and accessories created by Haroun. Through the company, Haroun aims to empower deaf people in developing nations, and says she uses African fabrics purchased from Africa and donated fabric remnants from Africa to promote eco-friendliness and sustainability.

“I’m a very visual person,” said Haroun. “I pay attention to everything I see. Sometimes a simple leaf, its texture, color, and shape, can be an inspiration for me. I love asymmetry and odd shapes — I have no interest in perfection. There’s beauty in distortion. My designs also draw from West African culture, as I was born in West Africa, and I add a modern twist. My artwork and clothing can be embraced by anyone, regardless of their race or culture. I want people to see that African art and clothing can be fun and modern.”

Haroun says funds generated from Afrotika's sales are donated to The Andrew Foster AfriDeaf Foundation— a non-profit organization geared towards promoting the education of deaf children and young adults. Haroun says she serves on its Board of Trustees.

“I’m deaf, so it’s my passion to witness the success of deaf children in developing nations,” she said. “This way, deaf children in Africa have access to school supplies and technology, placing them on the path to becoming successful members of their societies. What’s more, I just established a scholarship for outstanding deaf college students from developing nations who are enrolled in American universities — the DevNation Scholarship. Business and philanthropic organizations or individuals are welcome to donate to the scholarship.”

Haroun says Afrotika has also partnered with major Africa-based clothing and accessory designers to provide the best of African-made, which allows them to engage in the company’s fundraising efforts and gain a foothold in the USA. She says her son Matthew serves as the company’s CFO and handles logistics.

The writer, editor and published poet says she migrated to England at an early age then to the United States as a teenager. She has a bachelor’s degree in chemistry and has worked as a chemist for various biotechnology companies. She also earned a master’s degree in creative writing from the University of Baltimore.

“I’ve been an artist and fashion aficionado since I was a child,” she said.



A model wearing a top made from remnants of leather combined with authentic Vilisco fabric to create a contemporary African-inspired look. Photo Courtesy of Abiola Haroun



An African mask created by Haroun consisting of wood, leather, and fabric. Photo Courtesy of Abiola Haroun

“I was always surrounded by art, design and style. As an adult, I spent many years creating art solely as keepsakes. However, as time went by, I realized how gifted I am and that there are tons of deaf children in developing nations who are not as privileged as I am; many don’t have access to the quality education I’ve received. Hence the birth of Afrotika. It allows me to create and to also give back, which is a win-win scenario.”

Haroun says her dream is to hold a gallery exhibition at a major art gallery. “If you’re passionate about something, keep doing it, keep believing in yourself and don’t give up,” she said. “It might be hard at first, and you’ll encounter challenges, because running a business, or whatever you aspire to do, and having a disability creates many obstacles. But obstacles are meant to be overcome, and consistency pays off.”

For more information about Afrotika, which also holds pop-ups around Baltimore, visit <https://www.Etsy.com/shop/Afrotika> or the company’s Instagram page, Afrotika_Arts.



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Small Business Owners Lend a Hand for Third Braid-A-Thon, More Volunteers, Supplies Still Needed

By Andrea Blackstone

Many families feel the back-to-school shopping pinch, due to inflation.

“For one child, back-to-school supplies cost \$597 (K-12 average),” Capital One Shopping Research’s 2023 Back-to-School Shopping Statistics reported.

Diesha Contee, an Annapolitan who works as a community navigator and Eastport United Methodist Church’s pantry coordinator, is making time yet again to serve as organizer for a third Braid-A-Thon. The event is designed to help kids in grades 1-12 get ready for school by providing free cornrow and feed-in styles, haircuts for boys and loc maintenance services without parents or guardians having to spend a dime.



Diesha Contee, organizer of a third back-to-school Braid-A-Thon that will return to Annapolis, wanted to bring the hair grooming resource to Annapolis to help youth prepare for school. Volunteers and hair supplies are still needed.

Photo credit: Nyia Curtis

“I attempt to alleviate some of the stresses parents have revolving around back-to-school and to promote a good feeling for the kids getting their hair done,” Contee said.

Last year, 95 youths were served. This year, a whopping 152 youths are signed up for the community event.

Registration was required. “We have already closed the list,” Contee said.

The surge of youths who are scheduled to show up at Contee’s event indicates that parents still need help covering basic items for young students.

Capital One Shopping Research’s 2023 Back-to-School Shopping Statistics reported that many families with K-12 students purchase shoes and clothes, in addition to standard back-to-school shopping and standard school supply list items.

“The average household back-to-school budget in 2023 included \$257.12 for clothing and accessories,” the research also revealed.

Back-to-school budgets per child are expected to decrease by 10% to \$597, per information provided by Deloitte Insights.

Families are tightening their budgetary belts and focusing on necessities this year in U.S. households. Grooming expenses were not factored into data provided in the surveys, but in Black households, grooming expenses are typically pricier, due to the skill, time and effort that it can take to keep more fragile hair types healthy.

Well-groomed children may experience less incidences of bullying or teasing. Youth need opportunities to feel more confident and like their appearance. So, in the Black community, efforts like Contee’s are critical and not simply a matter of vanity.

Participating children will arrive with washed and blow-dried hair. Lunch, snacks, refreshments, all of the braiding hair and supplies will be provided, Contee said.

Lakel Cooper, will be on hand “doing whatever is needed done for every child,” including braiding hair.

The Annapolitan can normally be found tending to her business, Hair LC.

Instead, the stylist will provide support to local young people who need it from “the village” on August 27, 2023, at the third Braid-A-Thon that will be held at the American Legion, located 1707 Forest Drive, in Annapolis, Maryland. This event will mark Cooper’s third time getting involved with Contee’s cause.



Lakel Cooper braids Tyler Johnson's hair. Photo credit: Nyia Curtis

“Helping out and volunteering with this event warms my heart. To see these kids have a service rendered that they may not receive often is all I need to witness. This keeps me coming back every year,” Cooper said.

She added, “Braiding services can be expensive, for sure! I participate in this event for that reason. This is my way of giving back to my community. Last year, I was at the American Legion until almost midnight to get the job done.”

Contee can still use more community help with guiding children to braiders who will work on their hair, serving food and assisting with signing children in during the event. Hair care professionals, including barbers, are still needed to volunteer.

Contee also stated that donations such as hair supplies, pre-stretched braiding hair, edge control and metal comb donations

are especially needed. The devoted volunteer created an Amazon wish list, posted donation requests on social media and also shared needs for supplies through word of mouth.

Gift cards as a thank you to volunteer stylists such as Cooper and Tierra Smith would also be other helpful donations.

Smith is a loctician and natural hair stylist from Annapolis, Maryland. The proprietor of Twisted By Tee will return to providing loc maintenance and styles for the back-to-school grooming event for a second time. Normally, the average prices for her services range between \$75-\$200, but business owners such as Cooper, Smith and other Braid-A-Thon volunteers like Contee prove that giving back is sometimes more rewarding than making a profit.

“I want to help the children start the school year off with confidence,” Smith said.

Donations will be accepted until August 20, 2023. Inquiries about volunteering will be accepted until the same date.

Contee can be reached about volunteering or donations by calling 443-694-2723, or via email at emmanuel727@outlook.com.



Tierra Smith provides loc maintenance service to help a child in Annapolis, Maryland. Photo credit: Nyia Curtis

BLACK BUSINESS SHOWCASE

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Couple Finds Success Addressing Marketplace Gap, Creates Natural Hair Care Brand for 'Young Kings'

By **Andrea Blackstone**

Young men are not always given equal attention by the beauty industry, although Black shoppers are a growing consumer group.

“By 2024, the buying power of the U.S. Black population is set to reach \$1.8 trillion. Yet despite this, their needs are still not being met by many beauty and personal care brands,” according to NielsenIQ, the world's leading consumer intelligence company.

Cora and Stefan Miller became proactive about providing quality hair care options for males who need to style and properly care for textured hair.

The Millers founded plant-based Young King Hair Care with a mission “to shake up the beauty industry by redefining male grooming for the next generation of multicultural men, giving them the confidence needed to be their best selves 24/7/365,” according to Cora, Young King Hair Care’s founder, CEO and Chief Do-Gooder.

The Millers want Black and brown young men to celebrate and love their crowns confidently. Additionally, changing the narrative of how the world sees young men of color, who the Millers also call “young kings,” remains important to them.

“We’re here for Black and brown young men who strive to be authentically themselves, from their classrooms to their communities and everywhere in between,” Cora said.

Stefan, co-founder and CMO (chief marketing officer) of Young King Hair Care works with his wife in Atlanta. The company was founded in 2019. It was inspired by Kade, Cora and Stefan’s own “young king” who is now six and a half years old.

“Kade was born with a head full of hair that sent us down the baby hair care aisles sooner than most. We quickly discovered there was little out there for boys and for Kade, and right after he turned one was when we decided to take the initial steps of building Young King,” Cora said. “I firmly believe you

should see yourself in the products that you use, which is why I was so surprised to discover that there were no products specifically designed for curly-headed young men.”



Cora Miller, CEO of Young King Hair Care co-founded the company with her husband to provide grooming options for young Black and brown men.
Photo credit: Stephon X

Cora said that she spent a great deal of time looking for natural hair products that weren’t female scented and designed. Her search left her empty-handed. Creating products for young men with textured hair became a passion for the first-time mother who decided to retire from her corporate job.

Now is an ideal time to serve the needs of African Americans in the beauty and grooming sector.

NielsenIQ Omnishopper also reported that “hair care is the top category for Black consumers, with approximately \$2.29B in annual sales.”

Cora explained that running Young King Hair Care comes with various requirements, such as “quickly recognizing the importance of adaptability.”

Cora added, “The market and customer preferences are constantly evolving, and to stay relevant, we must

be willing to adapt our products, strategies and approach. Listening to customer feedback and staying attuned to industry trends have been instrumental in our success.”



Stefan Miller, co-founder and chief marketing officer of Young King Hair Care
Photo credit: Stephon X

Stefan pointed out that he and his wife’s company provides a premium, plant-based hair product line specifically for young males. Young King Hair Care provides plant-based offerings that include ingredients such as grapeseed oil, argan oil, shea butter and rosemary, instead of including harmful ingredients such as parabens, sulfates, and mineral oils.

“We believe creating clean, moisturizing products focused on hair health and growth as part of a simple, regimented approach would underscore the importance of self-care and grooming for boys at early age, while instilling the confidence they need to present their best selves every day,” Stefan said. “One of our primary business goals is for Young King to be

known as the solution to address such struggles by providing holistic grooming solutions, resources and tools that promote self-confidence, self-care and self-love for young men of color.”

Cora stated that the Young King Royal Treatment set, which includes a leave-in conditioner, essential oils and curling cream, continues to be a bestseller.

While back-to-school lists may include backpacks and school supplies to fill them, setting boys and young men up to feel confident and well-groomed should include encouraging “young kings” to properly groom their hair and take care of their bodies.

Cora reminded that it is important for “young kings” to keep their hair moisturized to prevent dryness, breakage and stimulate hair growth with essential vitamins and nutrients. Additionally, the company’s skincare line helps to address specific concerns like acne and hyperpigmentation.

“When self-care starts early, a skillset is developed to last a lifetime,” Stefan said.

Learn more about Young King Hair Care by visiting <https://youngkinghaircare.com>. Products are also sold at Target, Walmart and Amazon.



The Young King Hair Care Core Collection. Young King Hair Care is plant-based and boy-inspired.
Photo courtesy of Young King Hair Care

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Ground Rent – What is it and what can you do about it?

By Aja' Mallory, staff attorney at the Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service

Ground rents have been around since the 17th century when they were established in England and introduced to the colonies. Residential ground rents are still widely used today in Hawaii, Maryland and Pennsylvania. Maryland ground rents are mainly found in Baltimore and were created to make it less expensive for people to own real property because only the structure (the house) was sold and not the land.

So, what exactly is ground rent?

Ground rent is a lease agreement whereby a homeowner owns the house, but not the land the house sits on. Thus, the homeowner must pay rent to the owner of the land.

A ground rent lease is usually for 99 years and renews indefinitely. Ground rent holders often collect small amounts of rent either annually or biannually from multiple properties, which can result in a good return on the ground rent holders' investment.

Does my property have ground rent?

Maryland law requires that ground rent holders register ground rent leases on the Maryland State Department of Assessments and Taxation's (SDAT) Ground Rent Registry for the rent to be legally collectible. Ground rent deeds are filed in the land records of the Circuit Court in the county where the property sits. A deed for multiple ground rents owned by one owner is the typical way that the deed will be written. If you are unsure that your property has a ground rent, you can search for a ground registration here: <https://sdat.dat.maryland.gov/RealProperty/Pages/default.aspx>.

If you discover that there is no ground rent registered on your property, then there is nothing left for you to do. If you are contacted by a business claiming that you owe them ground rent payments, please contact Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service or any other

legal service agency to help you. Why? This could potentially be a scam or the ground rent holder is attempting to illegally collect monies that they are not entitled to.

If a ground rent lease is not registered, the holder cannot (1) collect ground rent; (2) bring a civil action to enforce any rights under the ground rent lease; or (3) bring an ejectment action against the homeowner.

If you discover that your property has ground rent. You should contact the owner listed on the registration form to determine how much the ground rent will be yearly or inform the owner that you would like to redeem your ground rent.

What does it mean to redeem ground rent?

To redeem ground rent is to purchase the land (or ground) your home sits on from the ground rent holder. You can redeem your ground rent if a ground rent lease was executed before April 9, 1884, and the ground rent owner recorded a Notice of Intention to Preserve Irredeemability within the last 10 years.

How much does it cost to redeem ground rent?

The cost to redeem ground rent has been set by the Maryland General Assembly. So, there should be no arbitrary cost given to you by the ground rent holder. SDAT provides a formula on the application. An example of how ground rent is calculated is provided below.

What Steps should you take to redeem ground rent?

Example: An annual ground rent of \$96 established in 1940 with three years of payments owed.
Calculation of redemption amount:
The Annual Ground Rent Payment: **\$96**
Divided by:
0.04 if the ground lease was executed from April 8, 1884 to April 5, 1888, both inclusive
0.12 if the ground lease was or is created after July 1, 1982
0.06 if the ground lease was created at any other time or is not provided
Subtotal: **\$96 + 0.06 = \$1600**



Photo Credit: Getty Images Signature via Canva.com

- First, determine if the ground rent exists and whether it is redeemable/irredeemable.
- Notify the ground rent holder who will either provide you with the redemption amount and next steps or direct you to complete the application for redemption through SDAT.
- If redeeming through SDAT, mail the following items to:
SDAT Ground Rent Department
Maryland State Department of Assessments and Taxation
301 West Preston Street, Room 801
Baltimore, MD 21201-2395
- Application
- <https://dat.maryland.gov/realproperty/Pages/Ground-Rent.aspx>
Note: If you have not received a bill and/or communication in the past three years, the application is a different form still found on the main SDAT ground rent page.
- Any recorded deed, deed of assignment or other document of transfer that establishes your interest in the property.
- Any recorded document that establishes the existence of the ground rent.
- A check made payable to SDAT for \$20 (regular processing in nine weeks) or \$70 (expedited processing in five weeks)
- 100 days after you receive notice that your application was approved, mail the following to SDAT's Ground Rent Department:
 - Affidavit of Certificate of Redemption
<https://dat.maryland.gov/realproperty/Pages/Ground-Rent.aspx>
 - The lump-sum payment via certified check.
 - SDAT will issue you a Certificate of Redemption.
 - Record the Certificate of Redemption with your county's land records office. This is located at the Circuit Court:
<https://mdcourts.gov/circuit>.

Aja' Mallory is a staff attorney at the Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service. 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 to submit your question to The Baltimore Times' legal tip column.

Ravens Young Tight Ends Want to Make Impact

By Tyler Hamilton

The tight end position for the Baltimore Ravens has been a strength for the team. Whether it was Shannon Sharpe, Todd Heap, or Dennis Pitta, some of the best Ravens teams have featured the position. Mark Andrews is the latest in that lineage.

Andrews has been the focal part of the passing game over the last couple of seasons. But don't forget about the young tight ends behind him. Second-year tight ends Isaiah Likely and Charlie Kolar are gearing up for a more impactful season in 2023.

"Charlie' and 'Zay,' they're coming along. It's another year as a pro. [It's] another year with their schedule, recognizing coverage," Ravens tight ends coach George Godsey said. "I think our defense is doing a great job of showing us unique looks. Every day, there's a goal to get a little bit better, and that's what their role is right now, you know, as second-year players."

Godsey said both players have sharpened their recognition of certain looks that defense presents whether it be zone or man coverage. They're also getting better being more consistent with the depth of their routes.

Likely was a fourth-round pick last season. He finished with 36 receptions for 373 yards and three touchdowns. Likely is 6-foot-4, 245 pounds which gives him a sizable advantage against safeties and linebackers. His best game was in Week 18 when he had eight receptions for 103 receiving yards in the 27-16 loss to the Cincinnati Bengals.

Last season Likely weighed in at 240 pounds. He said he put on five more pounds of muscle this offseason. Likely is looking to make strides as a blocker as well as catching the ball.



Isaiah Likely

Photo Credit: Christian Petersen/Getty Images

The biggest thing Likely is doing is simply taking things one day at a time. He's learning a new scheme with new Ravens offensive coordinator Todd Monken coming to Baltimore so it will take patience.

Another thing Likely is doing, is working on the little things that pile into more significant ones.

"I really just watched film on the little details and on the major details," Likely said. "[I] just really watched major games where I felt like I didn't play my best to help the team win. And then, [I] just stacked those days every day in the offseason and just really prepared and then just find my comfortability out here in OTAs and training camp so far."

Kolar was also selected in the fourth round last season. Unlike Likely, he didn't get to see the field as much as a

rookie due to injury. Kolar was placed on injured reserve on August 31, 2022. He was activated on November 8 (2022) and only had four receptions for 49 yards.

Kolar came into the NFL at 6-foot-6, 252 pounds. He's now weighing in at 265 pounds. That'll surely help him be a good blocker in the run game.

"You want to be like the most complete tight end possible," Kolar said. "There's more reps in the blocking world, so if I can keep getting better and [more] effective with that, I think there's a lot of opportunity there."

Kolar has a long frame that allows him to be a viable threat in the red zone. It's going to take time to get involved in the passing game. But once it happens, he can be an effective part of the passing game.

Monken's offense features tight ends Darnell Washington and Brock Bowers at Georgia. Washington is now a tight end for the Pittsburgh Steelers and Bowers will be a first round pick next season. Even though it was in college, they showed a good example of how the tight end can dominate in Monken's offense.

"They'll show some film. [Georgia] had two great tight ends last year. They had [Darnell] Washington and [Brock] Bowers," Kolar said. "Yes, he'll show some clips in the [offense] install stuff. They had a ton of yards. They had really interesting stuff with the screen game. They had a good vertical passing attack. It was definitely interesting. I mostly just pick up stuff that he puts in the playbook. I didn't watch many games."

Now it's time for the Ravens tight ends to make their mark in the new offense.

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