



# THE BALTIMORE TIMES

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## *Track Athlete with Baltimore, Virginia Roots Earns Three National Gold Medals*



*Gunner Hammett, 11, earned three gold medals during the week-long AAU Track and Field Junior Olympics 2023 in Des Moines, Iowa earlier this month. Gunner took home three gold medals in the 11-year-old boys division: first place in the 200-meter dash clocked in at 25.47; first-place in the 400-meter dash with a time of 54.53; and first-place in the 800-meter dash with a finishing time of 2:07.45. He broke the world record in the 800-meter in his age group, while competing in Philadelphia at the New Balance Nationals Outdoor, clocking in at 2:09 earlier this year. Gunner was born in Baltimore, Maryland and currently lives in Virginia.*

*(See article on page 11) Photo credit: Symone Hammett*

# WWII Military Veteran Receives Heartwarming Surprises on His 101st Birthday

By Andrea Blackstone

Baseball remains a favorite American pastime.

Lee Sassi, 101, has experienced pure enjoyment because of the sport. He was born on Aug. 10, 1922 in Star Junction, Pennsylvania.

"I just can't believe this— all of this happening," Sassi said, preparing to enter a mini-bus that would transport him to an action-packed adventure. "This is really something."



*Lee Sassi, a Lighthouse Senior Living resident, is surrounded by family during his memorable birthday at Camden Yards.  
Photo credit: Cissy Nickel*

Sassi had the opportunity to participate in the ceremonial first pitch on his 101st birthday at Oriole Park at Camden Yards in Baltimore, Maryland. A special day was planned for Sassi to attend the August 10, 2023 game against the Houston Astros. The franchise invited the baseball-loving veteran to come watch ball.

The dedicated fan's extensive baseball card collection includes every Baltimore Orioles player since the team began playing in Baltimore in 1954.

Gail Conaway, Sassi's daughter, recalls her hardworking father's

love of baseball. She surprised Sassi by flying in from Alaska to attend her father's big day.

"As he puts it, when he was growing up, collecting baseball cards was what the kids did," Conaway said.

Along with her sister, Conaway recalls playing baseball in a large yard where they were reared in Maryland. But Sassi's love of baseball has touched more than his two daughters over the years.

"He always had the neighborhood boys in the yard playing with them, too," Conaway said, mentioning how much her father loved baseball.

Conaway added that she's "always online trying to find a [baseball] card" for her father.

Sassi's baseball binders also include tickets from the 1958 Major League Baseball All-Star Game that was played in Baltimore's

Memorial Stadium.

"I love baseball," Sassi stated. "I loved the players, major leagues. I saved everything when I was a kid."

Sassi—who now resides at Lighthouse Senior Living in Ellicott City, Maryland—is also a decorated U.S. Army veteran who served during World War II and the Korean War. He received a Purple Heart and Bronze Star for his courage and sacrifice. His employment as a plasterer lasted until he was 40 years old. Sassi later worked for Westinghouse until he retired.

Despite his noteworthy military service, Sassi is a humble man who happily donned his Orioles hat, keeping "his team" in the limelight on his 101st birthday.

One person in Sassi's life brought the loyal Orioles fan who also served honorably in the U.S. military with great distinction to the Orioles' attention. Cissy Nickel, Lighthouse Senior Living executive director, reached out to the Orioles to share Sassi's story. After details were ironed out, the spry yet gentle man was in for a baseball lover's treat.

Sassi was unafraid to let his inner happiness radiate for all to see while visiting the Orioles franchise. He described his special experience as "hard to believe."

"I still think it's a dream," he said, before planting his feet on the field.

There was no shortage of picture-taking, handshakes and warm greetings. Tim Cousins, one of the Orioles' coaches, informed Sassi about another surprise, during his special visit.

"There's something special Topps [Company] baseball has done. I hope this might be your favorite card in time," Cousins said, handing Sassi a single baseball card. "They made this special for you."

Sassi was surprised with 101 copies of his own limited-edition player card, compliments of a company that manufactures baseball cards. A photo of Sassi in uniform during World War II appeared on the front of the heartwarming gift.

Sassi chuckled, shuffling through his cards.

"I don't believe this," Sassi said, marveling at his likeness that stared back at him.

Colden, Sassi's young great-grandson who attended the special celebration along with some of their family members and Lighthouse Senior Living staff, asked his grandfather an important question.

"Can I have an autograph?" Colden said, after Sassi handed a baseball card to him.

"Oh, come on now!" Sassi replied, happily signing it for his buddy.

Both Nickel and Conaway mentioned that Sassi's baseball card collecting hobby spread to younger family members like Colson.

"Mr. Sassi purchases the entire Topps MLB set each year for his grandson," Nickel also said.

Cheering staff members who had seen Sassi on television greeted him when he returned from his big day of baseball VIP treatment.

"Thank you all," Sassi said, upon returning to Lighthouse Senior Living in Ellicott City, Maryland.

On the day Sassi threw the ceremonial first pitch on his 101st birthday, the O's beat the Astros 5-4. And just like that, Sassi's unforgettable day was recorded. A special memory will be cherished by a family man and true American hero. Happy birthday, Mr. Sassi.



*Topps Baseball Cards presented Lee Sassi, a decorated veteran, with his own limited edition player card.  
Photo credit: Cissy Nickel*



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## Besides Running Private Enterprises in Baltimore, Some Black Businessmen Manage Entire Industries

By Regi Taylor,  
Editorial Page Editor

In our continuing observance of Black Business Month 2023, The Baltimore Times sat down with Mr. Al Hutchinson, chief executive officer of Visit Baltimore, a quasi-government agency tasked with marketing and promoting the City of Baltimore as a destination for domestic and international travelers to our great city.

visitors far and wide flocked to our city to share the experience. The vibrant atmosphere spurred by expansive growth around the Inner Harbor became a brand magnet. Visit Baltimore's current CEO assumed leadership of the organization seven years ago to become the city's chief booster.

**Baltimore Times:** "Good afternoon, Mr. Hutchinson, on behalf of the Baltimore Times, we appreciate you sitting for this interview. Hello, Ari [Hamilton, Visit Baltimore Corporate Communications

or big city problem. The fact that gun violence is prevalent in small towns and rural areas as well makes this clear. However, it is certainly true that one terrible incident involving a visitor to our city could derail much of our success."

**Baltimore Times:** "As a primarily American problem, how has a spike in urban crime and violence affected international travel to the United States?"

**Al Hutchinson:** "It is very unfortunate that American destination marketing is constrained to a degree by international travelers' perception of out-of-control gun violence in the U.S. It's a fact that travel advisories have been issued warning business and leisure travelers to be wary about visiting America."

**Baltimore Times:** "Besides simply increasing police presence, what other resources can Visit Baltimore bring to protect Baltimore visitors?"

**Al Hutchinson:** "Great question, Regi. First, let me say that while we are vigilant

in our efforts to keep visitors to Baltimore safe, we are equally vigilant concerning the safety of Baltimore residents. Safety begins at home. We have the Downtown Partnership of Baltimore Safety Summit, private Tactical Protective Services policing our conventions, and our high-tech Security Operations Center (SOC) to address cyber threats, among other initiatives."

**Baltimore Times:** "Does Baltimore City police provide Visit Baltimore with recommendations addressing visitor safety?"

**Al Hutchinson:** "Again, our emphasis is on safety for visitors and residents. Visit

Baltimore has always maintained a close working relationship with Baltimore's police commissioner, as we're both members of the mayor's cabinet. We're currently partnered with Acting Commander Whorley."

**Baltimore Times:** "How does Visit Baltimore impact the average Baltimorean?"

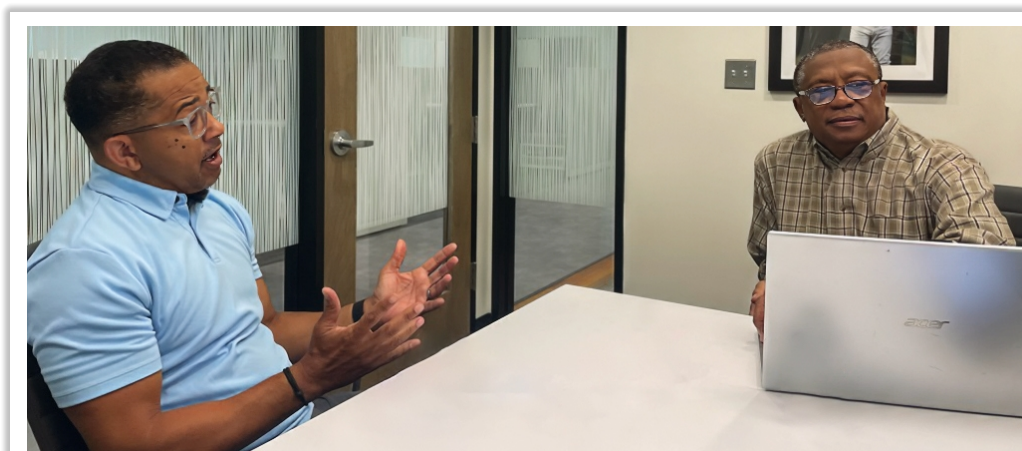
**Al Hutchinson:** "The impact is tremendous, Regi. Not only is the visitor industry the third largest segment of the local economy, many of the employment opportunities in the related hospitality sector are entry-level, commensurate with the skill level of many local job seekers. However, opportunities for promotion and advancement are practically unlimited due to training, skills development, and continued growth of the industry."

**Baltimore Times:** "What is the convention and tourism industry's overall impact on the region?"

**Al Hutchinson:** "The impact is multifaceted. Not only are visitors' direct spending for hotels, restaurants, attractions, and retail businesses supporting an array of jobs across the economy, it derives substantial tax revenue that supports government services for residents after the visitors have gone home. Residents are generally welcoming to our visitors whose positive experiences encourage further visitation."

**Baltimore Times:** "Wow. This is critical information we look forward to sharing with our readers. Thank you for helping connect the dots to the invaluable support Visit Baltimore quietly provides citizens that have a major impact on the vitality and viability of our city. Thank you for your time."

**Al Hutchinson:** "My pleasure. Thanks to the Baltimore Times for helping to spread the word. Good day."



*Baltimore Times' Regi Taylor (right) conducts Q&A with Al Hutchinson (left), Visit Baltimore CEO. Photo courtesy Visit Baltimore*

Formerly the Baltimore Area Convention & Visitors Association, the office was established in 1980 by former Baltimore Mayor William Donald Schaefer, coinciding with the opening of Harbor Place that year. One year after the Inner Harbor's opening, the National Aquarium in Baltimore welcomed its first visitors, five years after the Maryland Science Center graced the downtown waterfront in 1976.

Harbor Place spearheaded the revitalization of downtown Baltimore, reinvigorating the local economy and infusing Baltimoreans with renewed pride and exuberance so contagious that

Manager], good to see you again."

**Al Hutchinson:** "It's my pleasure, Regi. I've always recognized The Baltimore Times as an ally in the mission to elevate Baltimore. Glad to join you."

**Baltimore Times:** "As an industry, what has been the effect of urban crime and violence on tourism and visitation nationally?"

**Al Hutchinson:** "Frankly, it's a problem. The problem is one that affects people's decisions on where to travel, theirs and their families' safety being paramount. The issue at its core is really a problem of gun policy that has outlived the stigma of being a Baltimore

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## Editorial

# Minority and Women Businesses Lost At Least \$8 Billion in State Contracts Under Hogan

By Regi Taylor, Editorial Page Editor

Governor Wes Moore's executive order signed six months ago to "underscore his administration's commitment to strengthening participation, compliance and accountability for Maryland's Minority Business Enterprise program," (MBE) represents the first order related to minority business enterprise issued by a Maryland governor in state history.

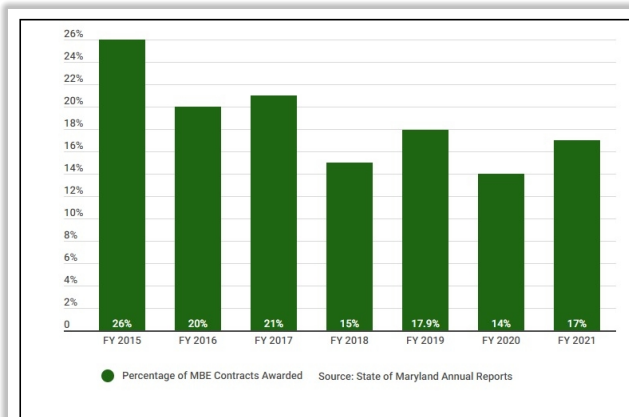
That history is 45 years in the making. MBE was established in 1978. But why does Governor Moore feel the need to pursue this course of action? Why now? Black Business Month is not only a time to celebrate the accomplishments of African Americans in commerce and industry, but also a time to assess, reassess, strategize, coordinate, execute and expand. Black Business Month is a time to take stock.

As a plan implemented nearly a half century ago to assure the participation of vendors who have been historically underrepresented, often marginalized as competitors for procurement opportunities with the State of Maryland, MBE was developed with certain reporting requirements to allow monitoring.

The move is intended to provide the governor with critical data necessary to evaluate whether the State of Maryland's Minority Business Enterprise program is performing satisfactorily and in compliance with the benchmarks set forth in a revision of the original plan in 2013 by former governor Martin O'Malley, the goal of achieving 29 percent of the state's procurement contracts to people of color and women.

What motivated Governor Moore to take this unprecedented action? It may be that Mr. Moore inherited an MBE program that was grossly out of compliance because his predecessor, Larry Hogan, did not prioritize inclusivity of minorities and women where doling out lucrative state contracts were concerned. How could this possibly have happened?

In the past several years, not all state agencies have consistently reported minority and women-owned business data as required by law, an analysis of state records by Baltimore-based National Public Radio affiliate, WYPR, showed.



**Maryland Minority Business Enterprises  
Lost \$8 Billion under Larry Hogan  
Attribution: Public Domain**

Beyond that, the state has yet to meet the revised goals set back in 2013 for reporting the status of benchmarks measuring procurement contracts with historically marginalized individuals, data reveals.

In the year before Larry Hogan assumed the governorship of Maryland, 2014, the state's MBE program achieved 27 percent, coming within two percentage points of meeting its legal obligation. Within six months of taking office in January 2015, the state of Maryland discontinued counting payments to nonprofits under its minority and women-owned business contracting parameters, which coincidentally or not, reduced its compliance to 26 percent.

For the duration of Larry Hogan's tenure, the state would not exceed an MBE procurement rate exceeding 21 percent, achieved in 2017, and bottomed out at 14 percent in 2020. For some reason, under the Hogan administration, the reporting requirement for the 17 state agencies participating in MBE procurement contracting who are mandated by statute to report their compliance, was mostly suspended.

The COVID-19 pandemic is not an excuse for the state's lapse in MBE

compliance because it was not private contractors in-general who lost the government's business, only women and minorities. Moreover, the loss of MBE business was also not attributable to simply not being reported. According to a

February 2023 statement by Governor Moore's office: "We believe the unreported data has a negligible impact on the MBE Program's overall performance data as reported here."

So why was there such a precipitous decline in the state's procurement contracts to women and people of color, and why was agency reporting of MBE compliance basically suspended under Hogan? Speculation for Hogan's policies are all over the map, however, a sub headline in a July 2020 article in Politico suggests: "Hogan portrays himself as a moderate who cares about minorities, but his decisions tell a different story..."

Whatever the underlying reason, the loss of state business designated for Maryland's minorities and women is colossal. Consider these losses:

- In fiscal year 2017, the State procured \$7.57 billion in goods and services from private vendors, allocating 21 percent to MBE's, a loss of \$605.6 million, 27.6 percent.
- In fiscal year 2018, the State procured \$8.35 billion in goods and services from private vendors, allocating 15 percent to MBE's, a loss of \$1.169 billion, 49.3 percent.
- In fiscal year 2019, the State procured \$8.4 billion in goods and services from private vendors, allocating 17.9 percent to MBE's, a loss of \$1.156 billion, 38.3 percent.
- In fiscal year 2020, the state procured \$19 billion in goods and services from private vendors, allocating 14 percent to MBE's, a loss of \$2.85, 51.7 percent.
- In fiscal year 2021 the State procured \$8.0 billion in goods and services from private vendors, allocating 17 percent to MBE's, a loss of \$2.184, 41.4 percent.

Total loss of state business to MBEs under Larry Hogan between 2017 and 2021, \$ 7,965,000,000.



## Breaking Literacy Barriers to Wellness: Why Reading Food Labels is Good for Your Health

By Jayne Hopson



Jayne Hopson  
Courtesy Photo

The COVID virus responsible for sickening and killing millions is fast fading from the public's attention. However, recent studies indicate illiteracy rates that declined during the pandemic continue to compromise the health of Black patients with poor reading skills.

For example, complex surgeries that were once performed in full-service hospitals, are now routinely done in ambulatory surgicenters. These outpatient procedures can feel rushed and offer a significantly reduced level of post-operative care. Surgicenters rely heavily on the patient or their caregiver's ability to read and understand the written medical instructions given at discharge.

The reading level required to properly access discharge mandates and directions stands in stark contrast to a snapshot of Baltimore City's subpar literacy rates. The Associated Press (AP) reports, "within the Baltimore City Public Schools, only 13 percent of fourth graders tested at or above proficient in reading in 2019."

This dismal statistic is pre-pandemic. It was collected just prior to COVID's 18-to-24-month

interruption of classroom reading instruction, which the AP predicts will put failing students further behind their peers.

Illiteracy is a global problem, begging for attention and the development of innovative technology driven solutions. A United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) study reports in "2020, children experiencing reading difficulties jumped from 460 million to 584 million worldwide, a rise of more than 20 per cent."

These low literacy numbers conflict with a health care system that depends increasingly on a patient population who can read, comprehend and effectively implement their provider's instructions. An illiterate patient who misreads the directions for their prescription medication is at risk for serious or life-threatening illness.

UNESCO writes "Literacy empowers and liberates people." An individual's ability to read can break several barriers to wellness. For instance, time spent reading and gathering useful information printed on virtually all food labels can increase awareness of how and why good nutrition is essential to our lives. Food labels can provide the following:

- **Nutritional Information:** Food labels provide valuable information about the nutritional content of a product. This includes details about calories, serving sizes, macronutrients (carbohydrates, proteins, and fats), vitamins, minerals, and more. Understanding these values can help you make informed decisions about the nutritional quality of the food and how it fits into your diet.
- **Allergen Awareness:** Food labels list common allergens present in the product. For people with food allergies or sensitivities, reading labels is crucial to avoid

consuming ingredients that could trigger an allergic reaction.

Allergens like nuts, dairy, eggs, soy and gluten are often clearly indicated on labels.

- **Dietary Restrictions:** If you're following a specific diet, such as vegetarian, vegan, low-carb, or keto, reading labels helps ensure that the food aligns with your dietary needs and restrictions.
- **Portion Control:** Food labels include serving size information, which is essential for controlling portion sizes and managing calorie intake. Often, people consume more than the listed serving size, leading to overeating and an inaccurate assessment of the nutritional content they're consuming.
- **Ingredients List:** The ingredients list reveals what the product is made of. This is important for avoiding certain ingredients you might want to limit or avoid, such as artificial preservatives,

additives, or excessive amounts of sugar and unhealthy fats.

- **Healthier Choices:** By reading food labels, you can compare different products and make healthier choices. You can opt for products with lower amounts of saturated and trans fats, added sugars, and sodium. You can also prioritize foods that are higher in fiber, vitamins and minerals.
- **Understanding Food Claims:** Food packaging often contains marketing claims like "low-fat," "organic," or "high in fiber." Reading the labels helps you verify these claims and determine if they are accurate and meaningful.
- **Weight Management:** For those aiming to manage their weight, reading food labels aids in tracking calorie intake and making mindful choices to maintain a balanced diet.
- **Educational Tool:** Reading food labels can be a great way to educate yourself about nutrition. Over time, you'll become more familiar with various nutrients, recommended daily values and what constitutes a well-rounded diet.
- **Transparency and Empowerment:** As a consumer, reading food labels empowers you to take control of your food choices. It allows you to make decisions based on accurate information rather than relying solely on packaging or advertising.

Reading food labels is a key step toward making informed and healthy food choices. It helps you understand what you're putting into your body, avoid allergens or ingredients you want to avoid and work toward your nutritional and dietary goals.



Photo credit: Jayne Hopson



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MEDICINE

# A Couple's Journey Through a Baby's Terminal Diagnosis, Opportunity to Advance Neonatal Research

By Andrea Blackstone

*Part I of a two-part article.*

Christina Byrum and Shawn Byrum were a couple who were happily expecting twins. However, on November 28, 2014, their happiness shattered. It marked a time when the Byrums were introduced to a serious birth defect called anencephaly.

"A routine sonogram revealed that twin A (Christopher) showed signs of acrania /anencephaly," Christina said.

"Anencephaly is a developmental abnormality when a baby is born without parts of the brain and skull. This condition usually happens at six weeks of pregnancy. Anencephaly occurs in 1 out of 1,000 pregnancies and affects 1 in 5,000 births," said Dr. Howard Popkin, an obstetrics and gynecology specialist who works at Bay Women's Health in



**Christopher Byrum on April 25, 2015.**  
*Photo courtesy of Sarah Michelle Photography*

Glen Burnie, Maryland.

Popkin also noted that the majority of babies born with this condition are either miscarried or stillborn. If they are born alive, the child's survival is typically only hours or days. Christina's case involved one fetus that was completely normal. The other suffered from anencephaly.

Popkin added, "The condition can be picked up with Alpha-fetoprotein testing in the early second trimester, or by

sonogram. If the child is born alive, comfort measures are appropriate."

By December 9, 2014, the expectant mother was sent to John Hopkins Multiple Pregnancy Management Clinic. There, she began the journey of monitoring her high-risk pregnancy.

Christina's medical team included: Dr. Howard Popkin and Dr. Dennis Stern, two of the partners at Bay Women's Health; Dr. Chuka Jenkins, maternal fetal medicine specialist at MedStar Harbor Hospital and Dr. Ahmet Baschat, Director of the Center for Fetal Therapy at John Hopkins Fetal Therapy Center.

"Dr. Baschat informed us of the potential occurrence of Twin-to-Twin Transfusion Syndrome, due to the twins sharing a placenta. He warned us that—if Christopher were to pass in utero—it would most likely result in death or brain damage for Eli," Christina recalled.

A pivotal moment occurred when the parents learned their twin boys, Christopher and Eli, needed to be delivered at 34 weeks due to weekly sonograms showing a decline in Eli's amniotic fluid level. "By 33 weeks, the fluid decline was causing growth restriction for Eli. It was decided that I would receive steroid shots to aid lung function for the boys to be delivered—via

C-Section—the day we reached 34 weeks. So, on April 25, 2015, we arrived at MedStar Harbor Hospital for the scheduled c-section. Our amazing medical team—led by Dr. Howard Popkin and Dr. Dennis Stern—delivered Christopher at 3:14 p.m., followed by Eli at 3:16 p.m.," Christina explained.

Popkin later stated, "The pregnancy went to term with both children being born alive. The anencephalic child died shortly after birth but allowed the entire family to bond and grieve together."



**The Byrum family at Medstar Harbor Hospital on April 25, 2015, took turns holding Christopher Byrum before the newborn passed away. Front row: (L-R) Paisley Byrum and Elaina Byrum Second row (L-R): Shawn Byrum (holding Anna Byrum), Serena Soutar (holding Ashton Byrum), Christina Byrum (holding Christopher Byrum), Brittany Byrum and Isaac Byrum.**  
*Photo courtesy of Sarah Michelle Photography*

Christina shared that "God blessed her family by fulfilling their desire of both babies being born alive."

Christopher, who weighed 3 lbs, 2 oz. at birth lived long enough to meet his siblings and extended family. Eli, who weighed 4 lbs, 6 oz. was taken to NICU for 14 days to receive accommodation to assist with temperature regulation and weight gain.

"I took Christopher to meet Eli in the NICU to be photographed together, while my wife was getting stitched up," Shawn recalled.

The Byrum family experienced a bittersweet mixture of joy and unimaginable loss during Christopher's short life.

MedStar Harbor Hospital permitted the twins' seven siblings, both sets of grandparents and several aunts and uncles to be present to celebrate the twins' arrival and honor Christopher's departure to Paradise.

Christopher's ninety minutes of life outside of the womb were filled with memories being captured through picture-taking and "many family members showering him with plenty of love," Christina said, reflecting on time

spent with her precious newborn in a recovery suite.

When Christina was initially informed about Christopher's anencephaly diagnosis, she located a Facebook support group called "Anencephaly Info."

"Through this group, I discovered the resource PurposefulGift.com, which provides families with information on all aspects of neonatal organ donation across the country. Their information led us to further explore organ donation," Christina said.

Unfortunately, Christopher did not meet weight requirements for organ donation, so his parents made a decision that led them down the path of research surgery instead.

A generous gift of education was provided amid tragic loss. Christopher's legacy still impacts neonatal and infant patients because of one family's brave decision.

In Part II, learn how Christina connected with Infinite Legacy - a nonprofit organ procurement organization which was previously Living Legacy - to support neonatal research.





BE I C O N I C

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# Baltimore Black Business Month Feature

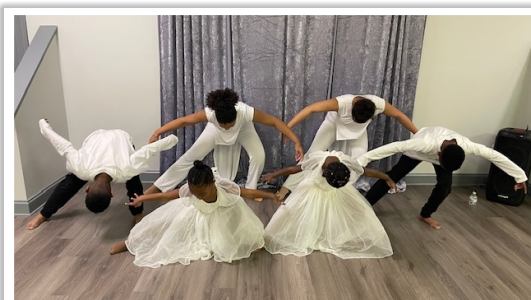
## Bowie State University Alumna Strives To Help Underserved Young Dancers

By **Andrea Blackstone**

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Move Your Way website, <https://health.gov/moveyourway>, provides insight about children needing 60 minutes of daily activity to help them to grow up strong and healthy.

Achieving better sleep, a better mood and better grades are among listed benefits gained from children being active.

"Kids who get physical activity do better on tests. It helps them focus and



*Creative Impulse Dance Company's dancers give a contemporary performance at Pleasant Grove Baptist Church in 2022. Photo courtesy of Creative Impulse Dance Company*

other studios. She formed Creative Impulse Dance Company in 2004 while she was attending Bowie State University. In 2008, Bowrey registered it as a business and opened her own dance studio with the help of a small business loan. Adult fitness and dance classes are offered quarterly.

The Baltimorean shifted her for profit business dance business to a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) in 2021.

"Our passion for dance has inspired us to reformat our business plan in order to provide free, quality training on a competitive and professional

level to underserved minority children. I found that talented dancers weren't awarded certain opportunities due to the inability to pay the expensive fees that come along with competitive dance," Bowrey said.

Bowrey mentioned one of the dance company's goals.

"With the proper funding, our goal is to offer all of our training for free to students and have all competition and travel expenses covered for qualified dancers," Bowrey said, noting that financial support is needed.

Engaging in hobbies helps youth to stay out of trouble, relax and boost their confidence. It is also important to observe how long-term stress can hurt youth.

"Being a victim or witness to violence or crime" and experiencing "serious illness or death of a close family member or friend" are just two potential causes of specific events that can triggered symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)," the CDC reported.

Although stress can impact children living any place, utilizing community resources such as dance classes or other extracurricular outlets can better help urban youth to invest in mental and physical resilience.

Dean Dixon, 10, a Baltimorean who has enjoyed learning the different genres of dance, is connected with Creative

Impulse Dance Company. Meeting new people, collecting trophies as a dancer, and learning new dance moves are three memorable pluses Dean mentioned. Hip hop, contemporary and jazz dance classes are dance favorites. Taking dance classes has also been beneficial in other ways.

"I have learned to be more confident, to pursue my dreams and keep going when it gets tough," Dean said.

Creative Impulse Dance Company will provide a street performance on Sunday, September 24, 2023, at 2:00 p.m. at Charles & 20th Streets in Baltimore, Maryland, during Artscape.



*Baltimore native and mother of three, Tahirah Bowrey, is founder and owner of Creative Impulse Dance Company; co-owner and co-founder of T2 Boutique; T2 Investments; and Private Party Igloo. Photo courtesy of Averie Sun Photography*

remember more of what they learn," per information provided on the website.

Dance is a perfect way to make moving fun for youth and adults. Tahirah Bowrey, a serial entrepreneur who was born and raised in Baltimore, knows the value of creative movement.

While reflecting on her own youth, the serial entrepreneur recalls dancing at

Hazelwood Recreation Center in Baltimore at the age of five. She later auditioned and danced at Baltimore School for the Arts T.W.I.G.S program.

Bowrey, who has worked for herself full time for over 10 years, integrates her gifts and passions into businesses. T2 Boutique; T2 Investments; Private Party Igloo; and Appropriately Inappropriate, a podcast that she plans to relaunch; and Creative Impulse Dance Company are Bowrey's brands. Her sister, Tamu Bowrey, is her business partner in some of the businesses.

"All of my business education derives from passion and experience," Bowrey said. "I have a bachelor's degree in psychology from Bowie State University and I taught reading and dance in the public school system."

Creative Impulse Dance Company's children's classes include ballet, hip hop, jazz, contemporary and musical theater for girls and boys. Private lessons, audition, performance and competition preparation services are also offered. Bowrey teaches many styles of dance to children and adult classes, although she does not offer training all on her own.

"My board member, LaTrice Johnson, is my choreographer partner. We also hire other local instructors to teach various dance styles," Bowrey said.

Bowrey stated that Creative Impulse Dance Company's classes and training are very affordable and comparable to



*(L-R) Kali Smith; Samara Jones; David Dixon; Dean Dixon; JaOnna Ferguson; and Jasmine Campbell won first and third places overall out of 22 performances that were held April 2023 at Kings Dominion's Annual Dance Festival in April 2023. Photo courtesy of Creative Impulse Dance Company*

If you are interested in being considered for Creative Impulse Dance Company's competition team, an audition is required. Dancers must be between six to seventeen years old. Upcoming auditions will be held Saturday, September 9, 2023, at 11:00 a.m. at Cahill Recreation Center, located at 4001 Clifton Avenue in Baltimore. Visit <https://linktr.ee/creativeimpulse> to obtain more information about Creative Impulse Dance Company.

# Track Athlete with Baltimore, Virginia Roots Earns Three National Gold Medals

By Andrea Blackstone



**Gunner Hammett was born in Baltimore, Maryland and now resides in Williamsburg, Virginia.**  
*Photo credit: Chris Meyer*

Eleven-year-old Gunner Hammett — a Williamsburg, Virginia resident, is no stranger to breaking track records.

“My family has always been there for me, no matter what the circumstance is,” Gunner said, speaking about what keeps him motivated to compete and accomplish amazing feats.

Gunner earned three gold medals during the week-long AAU Track and Field Junior Olympics 2023 in Des Moines, Iowa earlier this month. Gunner took home three gold medals in the 11 year-old boys division: first place in the 200-meter dash clocked in at 25.47; first-place in the 400-meter dash with a time of 54.53; and first-place in the 800-meter dash with a finishing time of 2:07.45. He broke all three of his personal records from this year’s track meets.

Gunner earned status as a three-time national record holder in Iowa — twice in the 400-meter dash and once in the 800-meter dash. Additionally, Gunner earned All American status in all three

of the events this year because he finished first place in them.

Despite his remarkable success, Gunner recalls beating a challenge early in life.

“When I was younger, I had asthma. I overcame that when I was three,” Gunner said.

Symone Hammett and Clinton Hammett are Gunner’s parents. Symone said that she grew up in Baltimore City. Gunner was born at Johns Hopkins Hospital located in Baltimore, Maryland. The Hammett family relocated from Maryland five years ago.

Symone, a mother of two, has become familiar with the routine of getting Gunner’s uniform ready for track meets and preparing meals. She also transports Gunner back and forth to track practice after he completes his schoolwork at home.

“That is quite a process because he’s pressed for time, so that he can make sure he has ample time to get his schoolwork done and also for us to travel and get to the practice track,” Symone said.

She is proud of her son’s athletic growth that is a result of training and God-given talent.

Gunner’s journey is a family affair. Even Gunner’s six-year-old sister cheers her brother on when he runs track. Away from sports, Gunner likes math and aspires to be a structural engineer someday. Sports planted seeds of discipline, work ethic and determination in the rising sixth grader.

“My dad just put me into track because he wanted to get my speed up for football. He said that track and football go hand in hand,” Gunner said, reflecting on his start as a six-year-old.

Clinton serves as Gunner’s coach. Gunner is accustomed to practicing speed and endurance three days a week as a part of his track workouts. On his off days, pushups, crunches, and planks are a part of the unattached track runner’s regiment.

Gunner trains by himself. Clinton explained that it is uncommon.

“In other sports, when you’re running, it’s more of a punishment. You know,

‘Hey, you need to get on the line and make sure you get this worked out right.’ As an unattached athlete, he’s running alone. So, whether it’s punishment or conditioning or not, he has no one to push him at practice,” Clinton said, explaining that Gunner mentally and physically runs against the clock.

When football is in season, Gunner can be found putting on a helmet, pads, and other kinds of protective gear. Perhaps athletic gifts are in Gunner’s genes. Clinton played Division 1 football on a scholarship. He also participated in shot put and discus throw, which are track and field events.

Clinton teaches his son that he must remain self-motivated.

“I think Gunner’s driven, and most importantly, he’s having fun. I don’t care what sport you do, if you’re not having fun, you’re not going to do it for daddy or another coach. You’re not going to give your all at it,” Clinton said.

He also explained that when Gunner was six years old, he was one of the

fastest children on the football field. The goal was to determine if Gunner’s talents could be further developed on a track.

Clinton added, “Football did not take a backseat. If you ask him which one he enjoys most, he would say that he loves them both 50/50. He does track I’d say eight or nine months out of the year. Then, for three months, he’ll do football.”

Gunner’s father also mentioned that the family holds fundraisers to raise money for traveling requirements for the AAU Track and Field Junior Olympics. As an unattached athlete, there is no true funding source for expenses. Symone mentioned that the AAU’s Junior Olympics’ event locations vary each year.

Gunner’s track dreams are not just for the short-term.

“I feel like I want to go to the Olympics someday,” Gunner said.

Follow:  
<https://www.instagram.com/gunning4gunner/> to learn more about Gunner.



*Photo credit: Amateur Athletics Union of the United States*

# Volunteer with Maryland Cycling Classic!

On September 3rd, 2023, world-class professional cycling comes back to Baltimore, showcasing the world's best cyclists including Tour de France participants, World Champions, National Champions, and Olympians from 25+ countries. The inaugural Maryland Cycling Classic Supported by UnitedHealthcare is the highest-ranked one-day pro cycling race in the United States for 2022.

The cycling race will be part of a three-day weekend community celebration of healthy lifestyle and living with participatory events, festival with interactive exhibits, local foods and drinks along with other fun activities. Hundreds of volunteers are needed to make this event a success, and it would not be possible without the help from people like you! All volunteers will receive a shirt.

Our biggest volunteer need is for course marshals. Course marshals assist race staff with managing critical driveways, intersections, pedestrian crossing areas, and help keep the course clear of any pedestrians, cars, bikes, golf carts, animals, etc. At times, course marshals may be asked to assist a police officer with ensuring that any spectators do not leak on to a live racecourse. Being a course marshal requires standing for a

long period of time outside in the elements. This is one of the best volunteer roles to view the bike race action!

To register as a volunteer for this year's Maryland Cycling Classic, kindly visit our volunteer sign-up page at:

<https://www.marylandcyclingclassic.us/volunteer/>. There, you can choose your preferred volunteer roles. Rest assured, we will do our best to accommodate your preferences and assign you to roles where you can shine.

If you have any questions or need assistance with the registration process, please feel free to reach out to our volunteer director at: [volunteers@marylandcyclingclassic.us](mailto:volunteers@marylandcyclingclassic.us) or 443-969-1541.

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# Rambling Rose

## '50 + The Second Half Magazine 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Awards Ceremony Will Be the Talk of the Town'

By Rosa Pryor

My goodness! Hello everyone! I am telling you this has been a month for me. I just got out of the hospital from a second spinal surgery, but I am home and doing pretty good. My "Boo-Boo," Mr. Shorty, is taking very good care of me. I will be ready to hit the street soon. As you can see, there is a lot going on this month for your entertainment pleasure.

I would first like to congratulate my buddy, Pat Brown from out of Washington, DC on her 50+ Second Half Magazine Annual Awards Ceremony, a black-tie affair, which will be held at the Patapsco Arena, 3301 Annapolis Road on Saturday, August 27 from 5-10 p.m. Ooooooh! Honey Child! There will be some jumping up and down doing some "James Brown" at this party, I can promise you that. The entertainment itself will be out-of-sight! Check this out! The Crosswinds, Skip Mahoney's Casuals, "Song Bird" Coates, Ray Apollo, Kim Smith and Bee Songstress just to get started. The ticket also includes dinner. Many artists will be honored. For more information, call Viola Griffin at 443-822-5356.

The Baltimore Museum of Industry presents a Community Concert on Saturdays August 19 and September 23, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. featuring John Lamkin Favorites Jazz Quintet. It is a free outdoor concert, part of the BMI Farmer's Market, 1415 Key Highway. And it is free parking.

Oh! You must visit the new BMA at Lexington Market. Their branch location at Baltimore's historic Lexington Market has officially reopened. This completely renovated space builds on the success of their previous stall in the former East Market giving visitors even more room to experience and create art. I am not too much into the Arts of this kind, but I know many of my readers are. This year, the BMA expanded its collection through the acquisition of more than 100 works of art, including significant works by artists connected to the Baltimore region. Sixteen of these works are now on view throughout the galleries this summer.

An die Musik Live, Jazz Venue on Charles Street has a hell-la-VA line-up for the month of August. Henry, the owner is doing a fantastic job of bringing in the best of the best jazz and blues artists from all over the country and always, always includes our local jazz artists. The line-up for this month is as follows: Friday, August 18, 7 p.m., Hannah Mayer & Friends; Saturday, August 19, Janelle Gill pays tribute to Ahamad Jamal; Sunday, August 20 at 5 p.m., Walt Weiskopf European Quartet; Tuesday, August 22, 8 p.m. will be Miguel Zenon/Luis Perdomo Album Release; Oh! My Goodness! My musical daughter Gabrielle Goodman is coming on Friday, August 25 at 7 p.m. and on Saturday, August 26 at 7 p.m., my musical son, Warren Wolf; on Sunday, August 27 at 3 p.m., Deep Water Jazz Band Encore Performance. Also, all their concerts are live-streamed.

A dear friend, Peggy Seeney Caranda recently had a book signing for her new book, "The Neighborhood's Child," It is a book of poems and verses from her childhood life. My next column will give you more details about this extraordinary woman and her new book and where her next book signing will take place.

Alright, my dear friends, I got to go now but remember, if you need me, call me at 410-833-9474 or email me at [rosapryor@aol.com](mailto:rosapryor@aol.com). UNTIL THE NEXT TIME, I'M MUSICALLY YOURS.



*Patricia Atkinson-Brown, the proprietor and the lady behind the fantastic "50 + Second Half Magazine" and the "Formal Attire Annual Awards Ceremony" will be on Sunday, August 27 from 5-10 p.m. at the Patapsco Arena, 3301 Annapolis Road. There will be a lot of live entertainment and awards presented. For more information, call Viola at 443-822-5356.*



*Say Congratulations to WMEL Radio's very own "The Duchess" Jureesa McBride and her radio show, "The Duchess Soul Sessions" and for being on WMEL Radio for 10 years, making her the second longest personality on WMEL Radio.*



*Ms. Margaret Nicholson is celebrating her 99th birthday on Saturday, August 19, 2023, from 1-6 p.m. at a Block Party on Cottage Avenue and Park Heights. The Ceremonial Street Sign Dedication is at 2 p.m. God Bless her. Congratulations!*



*Congratulations to Mr. & Mrs. James and Brenda Hamlin on their 55th Wedding Anniversary, owners of the famous Avenue Bakery on Pennsylvania Avenue and Baker Street.*



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# Defenders' Day Celebrates Baltimoreans Past and Present

On September 16, 2023, Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine will celebrate Defenders' Day, Baltimore's oldest holiday commemorating the successful defense of Baltimore from British attack in 1814. During the War of 1812, free and enslaved African Americans helped in the successful defense of Baltimore against the Royal Navy and British Army. The defense of the city was a community endeavor and despite their many differences, Baltimoreans united in the defense of their hometown.

After the burning of Washington on August 24, 1814, British commanders in the Chesapeake turned their sights on Baltimore. Home to 50,000 residents, Baltimore was the third largest city in the United States, one of its largest ports, and the home port of many privateers. African American men served in the U.S. Navy and often as privateers. African American men and women also helped dig trenches and build fortifications at Hampstead Hill (Patterson Park) to stop the British Army's land assault.

During the Battle of Baltimore, many African American men also manned the guns of the city's harbor defenses including those at Fort McHenry. On September 14, 1814, after a 25-hour bombardment, the fort's Defenders raised a 30'x42' American flag over the fort as the Royal Navy withdrew from the assault. The courage of Baltimore's Defenders inspired Francis Scott Key to write "The Star-Spangled Banner."

Fort McHenry's new Assistant Superintendent Robert Stewart has long felt a connection with the story of African Americans in the Chesapeake during the War of 1812 and hopes all Baltimoreans will find a connection with their community's history when they visit the park. A native of Trinidad, Robert moved to Baltimore at the age of seven. After a visit to Fort McHenry soon afterward, he was made a "Junior Ranger," setting him on his career path. After graduating from Randallstown High School, Robert went to Coppin State University, participating in "The Coppin Man" program facilitated by Brandon Scott before he was mayor. He volunteered with the National Park Service while completing his degree in history and secondary education. Graduation found him serving as a park ranger at Fort McHenry and Hampton National Historic Site, before moving on to become an

education specialist and acting director of interpretation at Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site, Tuskegee Institute National Historic Site in Tuskegee, Alabama and the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail in Selma, Ala. He also served as the acting director of interpretation at Hopewell Culture National Historical Park in Chillicothe, Ohio and Vicksburg National Military Park in Vicksburg, Mississippi. Before returning to Baltimore he also served as the superintendent of the Charles Young Buffalo Soldiers National Monument.

Raised in Baltimore County, Robert is excited to return home and reconnect with the community, family, and friends. He hopes the work he does in the National Park Service will help him to give back and inspire the community that helped to mold and guide him through his youth. With his wife Angela (who also works for NPS), the two are looking forward to sharing their knowledge and love of history with whomever they encounter. "Defenders' Day is Baltimore's holiday," says Stewart, "I hope kids can connect with these stories and create their own legacy in history like the Defenders did."



*Fort McHenry's new Assistant Superintendent, Robert Stewart*

## Schedule of Events

### Friday September 15, 2023

#### Pride of Baltimore II Deck Tours

Cross the gangway and come aboard to learn about Baltimore's tall ship, Pride of Baltimore II. Explore the deck and talk to her captain and crew. Learn about the history of Baltimore Clippers and Pride II; or hear from a crew member what it is like to sail a tall ship today.

### 7:00 p.m.—Parade!

Join National Park Service rangers and the fifes and drums of the Fort McHenry Guard as we parade through Locust Point to kick off the weekend!

### Saturday, September 16, 2023

#### 10:00 a.m.—Hoist the Colors!

Join rangers and living historians of the Fort McHenry Guard for the morning flag change and help raise the Star-Spangled Banner o'er the ramparts of the historic star fort!

#### 12:00 p.m.—Roar of the Drums, Voices of Baltimore

- Experience the sounds of the fort of 1814 as the Fort McHenry Guard Fife & Drum Corps will perform field music and calls from the War of 1812.
- Enjoy the modern drumming styles of The Marching Elite marching band.
- Enjoy vocal performances by The Singing Sensations choir of Baltimore

#### Pride of Baltimore II Deck Tours

Cross the gangway and come aboard to learn about Baltimore's tall ship, Pride of Baltimore II. Explore the deck and talk to her captain and crew. Learn about the history of Baltimore Clippers and Pride II; or hear from a crew member what it is like to sail a tall ship today.

#### 1:00 p.m.—3:45 p.m.—Explore Stories of Defenders Past and Present

Celebrate Baltimore's heroes past and present with living history, War of 1812 weapons demonstrations, a timeline of soldier's life by the 1-175th Infantry Regiment, Maryland Army National Guard, and musical performances by "The Adjutant General's Own" 229th Army Band of the Maryland National Guard.

- Cannon and musket demonstrations on East Lawn at 1:00 p.m., 2:00 p.m., and 3:00 p.m.
- Musical Performances on Orpheus Stage at 1:15 p.m., 2:15 p.m., and 3:15 p.m.
- 4:00 p.m.—Evening Formation and Raising the Storm Flag

Join park rangers and the Fort McHenry Guard to raise the storm flag as the Defenders did during the Battle of Baltimore in 1814.

#### 6:30 p.m.—Defenders' Day: Heroes Past and Present

Kick back in your chair or on your picnic blanket and enjoy an evening of music celebrating the service of defenders from 1814 to today. Evening program features:

- U.S. Army Enlistment Ceremony

- Concert by The United States Army Field Band

### Sunday, September 17, 2023

#### 10:00 a.m.—Hoist the Colors!

Join rangers and living historians of the Fort McHenry Guard for the morning flag change and help raise the Star-Spangled Banner o'er the ramparts of the historic star fort!

#### Pride of Baltimore II Deck Tours

Cross the gangway and come aboard to learn about Baltimore's tall ship, Pride of Baltimore II. Explore the deck and talk to her captain and crew. Learn about the history of Baltimore Clippers and Pride II; or hear from a crew member what it is like to sail a tall ship today.

#### 11:00 a.m.—War in the Chesapeake

Explore the history of the 1813-1814 Chesapeake Campaign that brought terror and destruction to small towns such as Havre de Grace and Fredericktown, culminated in the burning of Washington D.C. and the bombardment of Fort McHenry inspiring the creation of the Star-Spangled Banner.

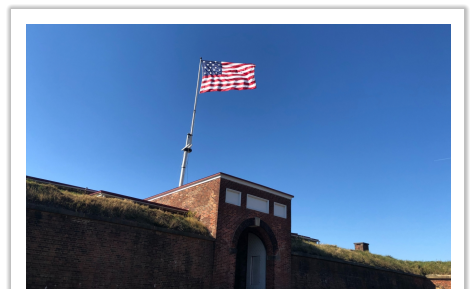
#### 1:00 p.m.—History of the Star-Spangled Banner

The American flag is a major national symbol today, in part, because of the events that occurred at Fort McHenry. Join rangers for this daily program as they talk about the design of the Star-Spangled Banner flag, its relationship to the park, and how we view it today.

#### 5:00 p.m.—Evening Flag Change

Join rangers to close out the day and reflect on the meaning of the national symbol by bringing down the historic Star-Spangled Banner and raising up the modern 50-star flag of today's generation

For more information on the Defenders' Day events at Fort McHenry National Monument & Historic Shrine, go to <https://www.nps.gov/fomc/planyourvisit/defenders-day.htm>.



*Photo by Joshua Woods on Unsplash*



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## Ravens Gain from Joint Practice with Commanders

By Tyler Hamilton

The Baltimore Ravens training camp is in full swing. It takes another step as they participate in joint practices with the Washington Commanders. Ravens head coach John Harbaugh said they've gotten a lot of work done in the two practices with the Commanders.

It's tougher when two teams are on the field because there's a lot of pride on the line. Both teams want to make it clear what their standard is by exerting their dominance on the field.

That being said, there were a couple of altercations. But those were quickly de-escalated. A lot of teams have turned to the joint practices as a chance to get game like work for the starters rather than playing them in preseason matchup.

"Well, it's more controlled. That's the thing about joint practice; you still get a lot of great work without the 'finish' part of it," Harbaugh said. "You don't get the tackling, the sacks – those kinds of things. I will also say, that's a double-edged sword, because then it becomes a gray area about how much is too much, and that's where the pushing and the shoving starts sometimes."

Cornerback Marlon Humphrey almost likes joint practices more than preseason games. He liked the challenge of tackling or wrapping up ball carriers without taking them to the ground. Humphrey said it's harder.

Then there's the situational part of it. They can create actual game scenarios to practice what to do in the particular situation.

The coaches can spend a whole period on something like red zone situations or even third downs. The focus can change from period to period but the work is valuable.

"We're kind of taking these days as they are our two preseason games. [We don't] know how much preseason action we'll see, but I think joint practices, it's some of the best you can really get."

Joint practices also give the offense and defense a chance to go against a new scheme and set of players that present a change of pace from the teammates they've been facing every day for a few weeks now.

It adds a different flavor and level of energy.

"It's amazing to have the Washington [Commanders] out here and being competitive and be able to practice against these guys," tight end Mark Andrews said.

"They have a lot of good players. Just going against someone different than our own defense – it's nice – feeling just a different body that you haven't seen all camp. It's a great challenge for us this time of year to make sure that we can get better and better and take each day and just continue that growth mindset."

Quarterback Lamar Jackson is happy to go against a different defense. But he said the work he got against his defensive teammates before joint practices has been good too.

"Iron sharpens iron," Jackson said.

One of the areas that is coming along well for the Ravens is the Jackson to Odell Beckham Jr. connection. The free agent addition changed the dynamic of the receiver room. Jackson said the chemistry is developing quickly.

Rookie receiver Zay Flowers has also made strides this week.

"He showed me he can do it against anybody else, not just our team," Jackson said of Flowers "He was making some crazy moves, great route running, great in and out of his cuts, and he was catching the ball, so he was looking pretty good out there."

The two teams will face off in the second preseason game on Saturday. The work has already been put in for most of the key players. But Saturday will be an opportunity for some of the fringe roster players to further make a case for a spot.



Lamar Jackson

Photo credit: Jessica Rapfogel - USA Today Sports Images

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