



# THE BALTIMORE TIMES

Vol. 38 No. 6

December 8 - 14, 2023

A Baltimore Times/Times of Baltimore Publication

## Governor Wes Moore Celebrates Inclusive Playground at The Children's Guild: Transformation Academy



*Governor Wes Moore pushes 10-year-old Faaris Mian on an adaptive swing while attending The Children's Guild: Transformation Academy's ribbon cutting for a new adaptive playground on December 5, 2023. The inclusive playground showcases a model for inclusive education and play spaces. The Children's Guild: Transformation Academy's playground located at 6802 McClean Boulevard in Baltimore, Maryland is designed specifically for students with disabilities, particularly those with an autism spectrum diagnosis. ( See article on page 6 )*

*Photo credit: Joe Andrucyk, Office of the Governor*



# Baltimore Native Salvatore Vincent De Paul Zannino Produces, Directs Holiday Film

By Ursula V. Battle

With the beautiful Gramercy Mansion and the famed Village of Cross Keys in Baltimore as their backdrop, three couples attend a retreat during the holidays to strengthen their respective relationships. New feelings emerge when a couple's son shows up to the retreat uninvited and falls for the manager. The famed therapist guiding the retreat works through feelings of her own after getting to know the groundskeeper.

This gathering is certain to be a memorable one, and you can watch it all unfold in "Christmas Couples Retreat," premiering Sunday, December 17, 2023 at 3 p.m. on Maryland Public Television (MPT). The film is directed and produced by Baltimore's own Salvatore Vincent De Paul Zannino.

"I knew that I wanted to do a holiday film that really supported local filmmakers," said Zannino, who is a two-time Emmy award winner. "I felt so happy to be back in my hometown."

In addition to directing "Christmas Couples Retreat," Zannino also stars in the 80-minute film along with Christene Marie; Brandon Tyler Russell, Karina Michel; Dana May Jamison; Sherrod Taylor; Jimmy Clabots; Vanessa Meadows; Tony DiVirgilio Jr; Leah Villone; Bill Dawes; and Cali Norton.

"Christmas Couples Retreat" is the first holiday film lensed at Gramercy Mansion and the Village of Cross Keys.

"The reason why I selected the Gramercy is because it was very cinematic," said Zannino. "It was very Tudor style. Why not showcase Baltimore? A lot of times we see one

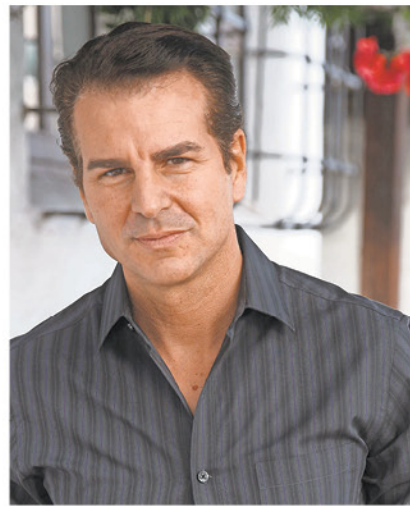
side of Baltimore, but Baltimore has many other colors and layers. Baltimore is also very historic. I love Baltimore history. If you shoot a movie, I feel it should be done in Baltimore."

Zannino's career spans three decades, starting with his first feature role in "Hairspray" directed by John Waters. He has appeared on numerous TV shows including: "West Wing"; "Frasier"; "Charmed"; "Blacklist"; "Madame Secretary"; "The Encounter"; and The Bay. His career as a producer includes award-winning evergreen family films such as "Love on the Rock."

A Miami, New York, and Los Angeles bi-coastal film and television actor, he graduated from Johns Hopkins University before moving to Miami Beach to work at Mt. Sinai Medical Center. While working at the Miami Beach Hospital, he was discovered and began doing fashion shows for the late designer Gianni Versace. His acting career began with his first role as "Beowulf."

"For me, I think it was a natural progression going from actor, director, and producer, because you know what it takes to get in those shorts...15 hours a day," he said. "I call them shorts, but they're long. Natural producers and directors understand the work of creating the content, and I've spent so many years working in this industry."

Zannino's father was a mortuary



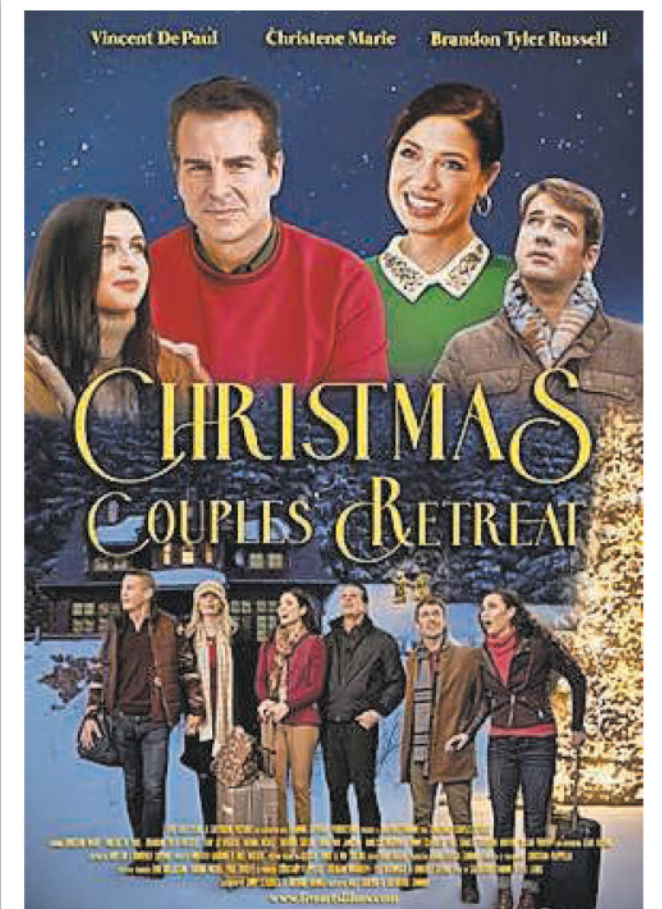
Salvatore Vincent De Paul Zannino is a native of Baltimore and also stars in the film. Courtesy Photo

scientist and owned funeral homes in Maryland, while his mother dedicated her time to chairing committees for the March of Dimes and other organizations.

"It's all about community, it's all about values, and it's all about listening," he said. "It's also about understanding each other. My family was always part of our community and I wanted to do something for our community. That's why I'm so proud of this film."

Zannino recently appeared in IFC's Sundance Film Festival Alfred P. Sloan award-winner "TESLA." He volunteers his time at the House of Camillus for battered women. He is the founder of <http://www.fiveartsfilms.com> and supports emerging filmmakers and artists.

"When people watch "Christmas



The holiday film Christmas 'Couples Retreat' was filmed at Gramercy Mansion and the Village of Cross Keys. The film's storyline centers around three couples who attend a retreat during the holidays. Courtesy Photo

Couples Retreat," I want them to be in the moment, conscientious and entertained," said Zannino. "I also want people to understand relationships. People may come up with their own epiphanies or revelations about caring for each other. No matter who we are, we all are going through struggles. I believe this movie is quite brilliant."

"Christmas Couples Retreat" is Not Rated. For more information, visit <https://www.mpt.org>.



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## The Yuletide Holidays Are Here!

By Karen Clay

Clay Technology and Multimedia, L.L.C.

Excitement is in the air and the shopping has begun! Kwanzaa, Hanukkah, and Christmas are around the corner along with other traditions practiced during this festive season. The Andy Williams song, “It’s the Most Wonderful Time of the Year,” invokes the image of a celebratory time for many of us, filled with excitement and anticipation, joy, and exuberance.

Amidst the holiday cheer, however, it’s crucial to remember that this is also a prime time for cybercriminals to be Dr. Seuss’ “Grinch Who Stole Christmas.” The increase in holiday shopping and digital transactions opens doors to various threats, including gift card frauds, social engineering tactics, and online shopping challenges. As we embrace the spirit of the season, let’s also equip ourselves with the knowledge to ensure safe shopping and gift-giving.

Here are some tips to keep the Grinch away and criminals at bay!:

### Gift Card Frauds

Gift cards have become an easy, convenient way to spread cheer among family, friends, and co-workers. It is the go-to item when we don’t know the ideal gift to give someone. It can be a real “downer” to inadvertently give a loved one a card that has been compromised. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC,) enforces a variety of consumer protection laws affecting just about every area of commerce. They provide advice on their website (<https://bit.ly/3R1wY2o>) about how to avoid gift card scams. The Consumer Reports website (<https://bit.ly/48032L6>) is a good source of information on avoiding these scams as well.

A big reason that scammers often use gift cards to defraud people of



*When shopping in stores we must be just a vigilant about scams, especially regarding gift cards. Graphic design by Karen Clay*

their money is because they’re just like cash. It is hard to trace any misuse with these cards. Unlike credit cards, there generally isn’t any recourse for you when a gift card is stolen or used without your knowledge. Here are three top things to look out for relative to gift cards:

When purchasing a gift card, examine it closely to make sure the protective sticker is still on the card and the packaging has not been altered. This includes looking for tears on the packaging, or a barcode that appears to be taped over. Keep a copy of the gift card and the store receipt. You can take a picture of the gift card and store the receipt with your phone and keep it in a safe place. This information will help you file a report with the gift card company if you need to. Gift cards are never used to pay bills! If a scammer calls you trying to dupe you into paying a utility bill, tell you you’ve won a prize, pretend to be a family member with an emergency – anything that ends in an instruction for you to purchase a gift card and provide them the number, don’t do it! These are

all scams designed to get money from you.

Being vigilant in the purchase and use of gift cards will keep your holiday merry and your wallet happy!

### Safe Online Shopping

During this period, we probably shop online more than any other time of the year. Scammers know this, so they make sure they do everything they can to lure you to unsafe sites that appear legitimate to take your money or infect your device for later exploitation. According to the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA,) The three main ways they accomplish this are:

- **Creating fraudulent sites and email messages** — Unlike traditional shopping, where you can physically enter a store, thereby knowing the store is what it claims to be, attackers can create malicious websites or email messages that appear to be legitimately coming from a known establishment or charity.

- **Intercepting insecure transactions** — If an online vendor does not use encryption, an attacker may be able



*Karen Clay  
Clay Technology and Multimedia  
Courtesy, Karen Clay*

to intercept your information as it is transmitted. It is important to refrain from purchasing items from sites that are not secure.

- **Targeting vulnerable computers** — If you do not take steps to protect your computer from viruses or other malicious code, an attacker may be able to gain access to your computer and all the information on it. Once your computer, or even your smartphone is infected, it can also be used to attack the vendor’s website through the malware that was installed.

**Prior to making a purchase online, consider the following:**

- Read customer reviews of the merchant and check trusted sources, like the Better Business Bureau.
- Use a credit card instead of a debit card. You might be able to opt for a third-party payment service instead like PayPal, Apple Pay or Google Pay.

Being mindful of these suggestions and paying attention to the above information can ensure that you continue to have the happy, joyous holiday season you have envisioned.





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## Children’s Smiles are Priceless: Free, Online Teaching Resource Promotes Oral Health in Schools

By Jayne Hopson

In 2000, the Surgeon General issued a national call to action to address the “silent epidemic” of dental disease in children. Today, “pediatric dental disease (severe tooth decay) remains the most prevalent chronic disease affecting children in America,” says The Tooth Fairy, a children’s dental health advocacy group.

The nonprofit organization’s name may bring a smile, but their belief is informed by troubling dental health statistics, underscoring the urgency of their mission. According to the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry Foundation: 51 percent of elementary school students have cavities; five times more children experience cavity-related absences than their peers with asthma; and other chronic illnesses. Further, it is estimated that 34 million school hours are lost each year related to dental problems.

The Colgate Bright Smiles, Bright Futures® (BSBF) program and Hip Hop Public Health (HHPH) announced the development of the Paste Time Educator Toolkit, a free, online educational teaching resource to help educators include oral health education in their curriculum. The toolkit continues the partnership between BSBF and HHPH, which released the bilingual song, “Paste Time,” an educational tool that teaches key elements of good oral hygiene to children and their families.

The Paste Time Educator Toolkit was developed by health and education experts, with input from Hip Hop Public Health’s Educator Review Group. The curricular resources are aligned with National Health Education Standards, National Physical Education Standards, and Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) core competencies.

The toolkit aims to help educators

teach students about the importance of good oral health, which is especially critical as the World Health Organization estimates that 514 million children suffer from caries in primary teeth. In the United States, caries is the most common chronic disease of childhood. While preventable, untreated cavities can cause pain and infections that could lead to problems eating, speaking, playing, and learning.

“Every single day, educators are out there, doing incredible work, empowering young people with the lifelong skills they need to champion their health,” said Lindsey Harr, Chief Programs and Operations Officer for Hip Hop Public Health. “That’s why we’ve created the Paste Time Educator Toolkit – where music takes center stage to make oral health education engaging and fun. Our vision is that the lesson plans, classroom activities, and family-oriented take-home materials will help teachers and caregivers inspire children to brush their teeth every day and understand the benefits of good oral health.”

“When we think about oral health and its connection to our overall health and wellbeing, we cannot leave any stone unturned in terms of reaching children and their families to eliminate health disparities and improve health outcomes,” explained Dr. Gillian Barclay, Senior Vice President Global Oral Health and Scientific Affairs, Colgate-Palmolive Company and a Hip Hop Public Health Board Member.

“As a medium, music makes messages memorable, and both Colgate Bright Smiles, Bright Futures and Hip Hop Public Health are laser-focused on promoting health literacy in a manner that is relevant to the communities we



Jayne Hopson  
Courtesy Photo

serve and helps create brighter futures,” said Dr. Barclay.

Hip Hop Public Health is an internationally recognized organization that creates research-based educational resources by harnessing the power of music and culture to improve health in communities that are underserved. It has a 15-

year track record of using an evidence-based framework for health promotion and behavior change.

All of Hip Hop Public Health’s 200+ educational resources are available to stream for free, removing access barriers for teaching, learning and health literacy. The Paste Time video was produced and composed by Q. Worth and co-writer BJ Gray. In addition to Doug E. Fresh and Dr. Olajide Williams of Columbia University, a world-renowned leader in community-based behavioral intervention research, the song features youth artist Heaven and Dr. Monique “Docta Mo Flow” Hedmann-Maxey.

Since it was established in 1991, Colgate’s Bright Smiles, Bright Futures® program has reached more than 1.6 billion children in more than 100 countries with oral health education. The program strategically partners to reach underserved children and their families where they are born, live, learn, work and play.

BSBF continues to promote health equity, optimal health and wellbeing, and to lead global social impact efforts that empower children and families to achieve healthy and bright futures. In the U.S., BSBF dental vans are based in hub cities and travel to rural and urban communities to help raise awareness about the importance of children’s oral health.



# Playground Dedication

## Governor Wes Moore Celebrates Inclusive Playground at The Children's Guild: Transformation Academy

ANNAPOLIS, MD — Governor Wes Moore attended the ribbon-cutting ceremony at The Children's Guild: Transformation Academy's Adaptive Playground on December 5, 2023. The new, inclusive playground showcases a model for inclusive education and play spaces. Following the ribbon cutting ceremony, Governor Moore had the opportunity to tour some of the school's facilities. Also in attendance were Maryland Department of Disabilities Secretary Carol Beatty, as well as representatives from the Maryland State Department of Education.

"This new playground will set the standard for our state and our country in what a fully inclusive playground looks like," said Gov. Moore. "Today, we don't just take a step toward inclusivity – we take a step toward the Maryland we all want to build: one that is loving, caring, and thriving. This is about making sure that every Maryland child is seen and supported, regardless of ability."

In October, the Maryland Department of Disabilities and the Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council released the Framework and Toolkit for Inclusive Playgrounds in Maryland. The goal is to increase the number of inclusive playgrounds in state, county and municipal parks, school facilities, and neighborhood communities. Expanding and increasing the number of inclusive playgrounds across the state will create opportunities for individuals with disabilities and their families and caregivers to enjoy spending time outdoors playing, learning and creating friendships with their non-disabled peers.

The Children's Guild is a nonprofit organization founded in 1953. It serves children, families and child-serving organizations and is dedicated to transforming how America cares for its



*Adaptive slide Photo credit: Joe Andrucyk, Office of the Governor*

children through education, behavioral health, and national training and consultation services.

The Children's Guild: Transformation Academy is a 12-month, non-public separate day school for students ages 5-21, whose primary diagnosis is autism, but who may also have co-existing diagnoses of sensory processing disorder, a specific learning disability, health impairment, or multiple disabilities. The enrollment capacity for the school is 100 students.

Transformation Academy's playground is designed specifically for students with disabilities, particularly those with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. The playground utilizes specialized equipment and sensory friendly features specifically designed to accommodate the sensory sensitivities often associated with autism spectrum disorder.



*Photo credit: Joe Andrucyk, Office of the Governor*

This playground dedication emphasizes the importance of providing quality education and recreational opportunities for students with disabilities, particularly those with autism spectrum disorder, and serves as a model for inclusive playgrounds in Maryland.

Last month, Governor Moore celebrated the winners of the Governor's Award for Disability Culture and Achievement at the State House. The event recognized the outstanding achievements of Marylanders with disabilities.





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# Massive Multi-Day Event Uplifts Community Members

## Operation Ten City Visits Baltimore, Provides Hope, Education and Resources

By Roosevelt Boone

Baltimore experienced a dose of healing, renewed thinking and concepts aligning with spiritual building on November 17-18, 2023 at the Baltimore Convention Center through Dr. Bill Winston and Bill Winston Ministries' seventh stop of the Operation Ten City (OTC) campaign. Winston is a globally renowned pastor, entrepreneur and business leader.

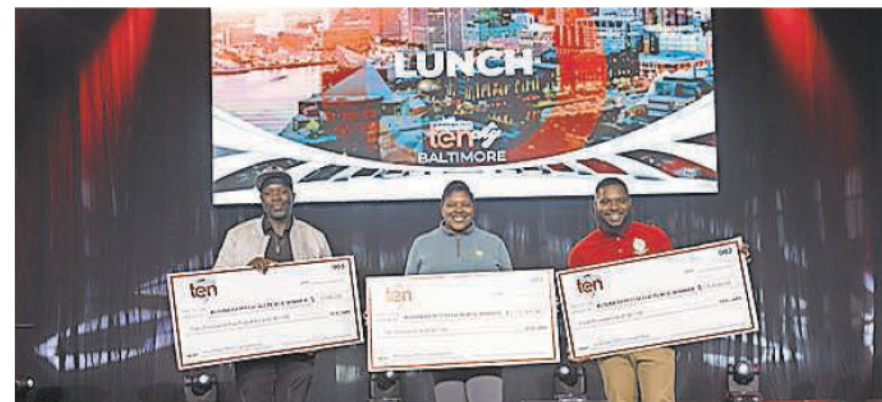
According to a press release, "Dr. Bill Winston and Bill Winston Ministries invested more than \$1 million in [the] Baltimore Community during Operation Ten City" and over 8,000 people were fed with Heaven's Pantry Food Giveaway.

Operation Ten City Campaign is a mega event experience that blends giveaways, workshops and inspiring deeds that promote economic restoration and prosperity in 10 U.S. cities.

The initiative is meant to inspire faith-based communities to activate hidden potential and pursue the fullness of God's calling for their lives, businesses and organizations, per further details provided in a press release.

"Through programming centered on community outreach, business, and entrepreneurship, as well as faith and the supernatural, Operation Ten City supports the development of people and communities with a vision to help them access true economic prosperity and self-sufficiency through wealth-building, entrepreneurship and ownership."

Operation Ten City's events are free and open to the public. Baltimore was the seventh city of the massive campaign. Operation Ten City has previously been held in Los Angeles,



**Business Pitch Competition winners from l-r: 3rd prize winner, Joseph Johnson; 1st prize winner, Tierra Latham; and 2nd prize winner, Da'Shon Forrest.**  
Photo credit: Paul Hairlson Photography

California; St. Louis, Missouri; Detroit, Michigan; Cleveland, Ohio; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Chicago, Illinois.

According to Dr. Bill Winston's son, Pastor David S. Winston, Baltimore Operation Ten City was held "to assist in the transformational process of Baltimore City with the intent to create vocational centers and skill training centers."

He also stated that "this endeavor also had a purpose to empower people."

Pastor David mentioned wanting to bring churches together in a unified front to enter discussions that they have never had before.

"We believe we can transform communities and churches, by the way they see themselves," he said.

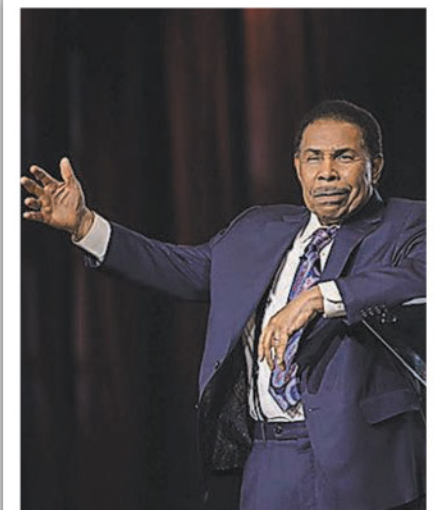
Pastor David further stressed the importance of partnerships when he said that the campaign's purpose was to lessen the economic divide in the projected 10 cities in which partnerships will ensue. He stated that the partnerships will entail city and state officials; community leaders; spiritual community leaders; activists;

residents; businesses; entrepreneurial persons; youth and other stakeholders.

He also expressed the ministries' intent to assist and empower Black and brown people to close the wealth divide through ownership, and self-production of goods and services. Pastor David spoke about the transformation of cities and communities and for the need for the spiritual community to have a moral compass with God being the litmus test.

Both Dr. Winston and his son, Pastor David, echoed the same challenge that the success of this campaign depends heavily on the partnerships that were to develop in each city. He and his father asserted that these efforts were not founded in religion but based on spirituality.

Pastor Bill Winston announced that 2,200 bags of groceries to feed more than 8,000 were distributed on Saturday, November 18 during Operation Ten City's two Heaven's Pantry food distributions, one at Carver Vocational School and another at Mount Pleasant Community Life Center. Additionally, 1,000 gas cards



**Dr. Bill Winston** Photo credit: Paul Hairlson Photography

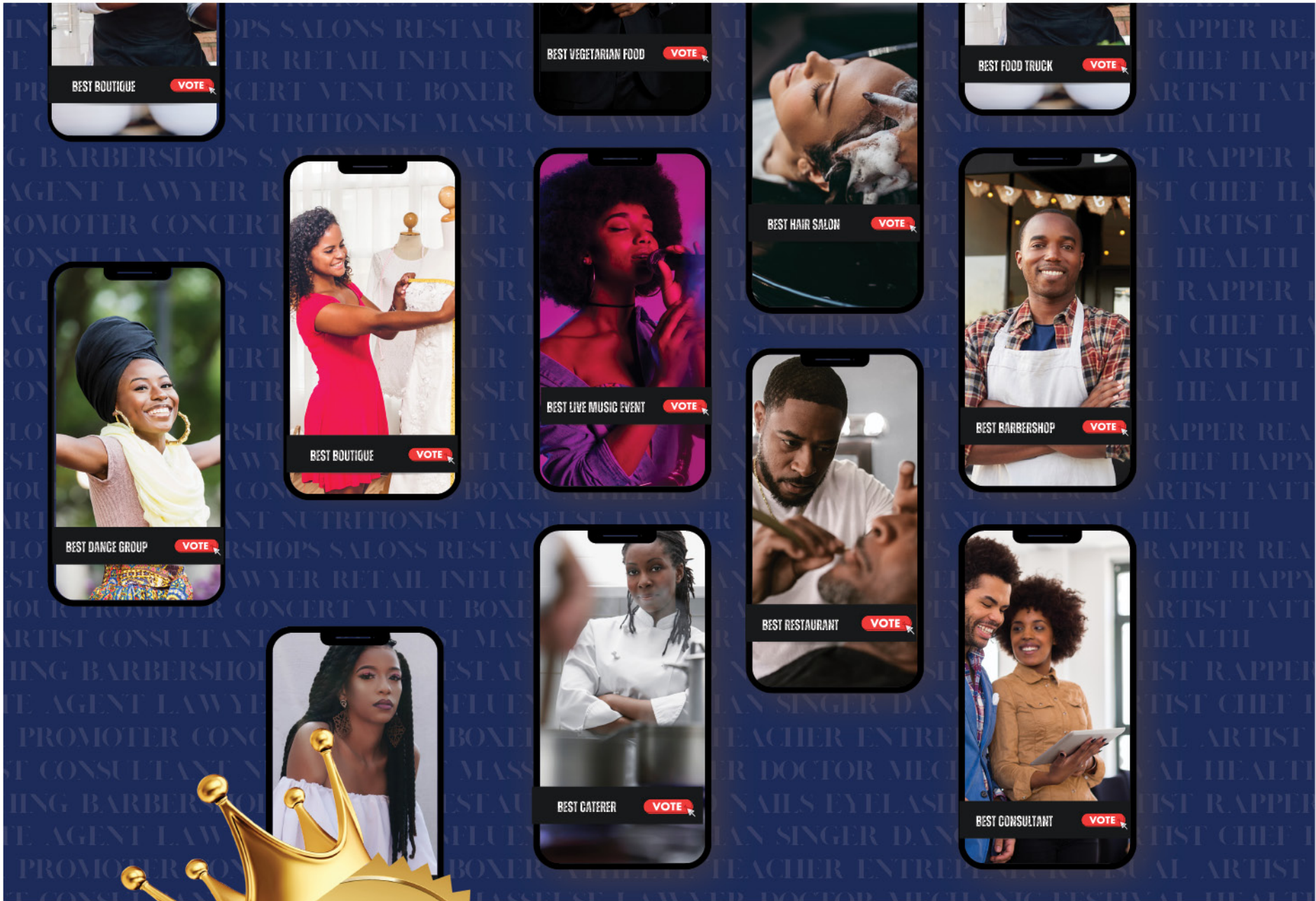


**Ray Lewis, former Baltimore Ravens linebacker, 2x Super Bowl Champion and Pro Football Hall of Famer.** Photo credit: Paul Hairlson Photography

with a total value of \$50,000; 200 Uber cards totaling \$5,000 in value; over \$150,000 in brand-new clothing

See **TEN CITY**, page 14





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# There's an App for That!

## Entrepreneur Uses Technology to Promote African American Businesses

By Andrea Blackstone

Vincent Anderson Johnson, Jr. is an entrepreneurial visionary who created an app to promote Black businesses.

"I love being an entrepreneur. I love the process of taking an idea from beginning to completion. Seeing the idea come to life brings me joy and excitement," Johnson said.

He further explained that his XCLUSIT Clothing brand focuses on inspirational and motivational messages. It is also featured on the app.

The expert marketer earned a Master of Divinity from Vanderbilt University with a concentration on the Black community and Black church economics. While working at a church performing social media marketing duties after Johnson graduated, he came across a Christian classified ad. Johnson felt inspired to create a paper classified promoting Black-owned businesses in Nashville, Tennessee.

"While working on the classified, I felt that this would be an amazing app [www.xclusit.app], so I taught myself how to code and went to work building what is now XCLUSIT," Johnson said. "With XCLUSIT features, we give Black consumers a shopping experience where they can follow Black-owned businesses they love. They can shop, receive promotions and offers suited just for them and be introduced to new Black-owned businesses they desire to find."

Johnson, who is the CEO of XCLUSIT, also explained that participating Black businesses can build their profile store, market their offerings to customers with short video reels, product galleries and promote their store on their follower's timeline through the platform.

He added, "XCLUSIT's backend dashboard gives Black businesses the



Vincent Anderson Johnson, Jr.,  
CEO of XCLUSIT

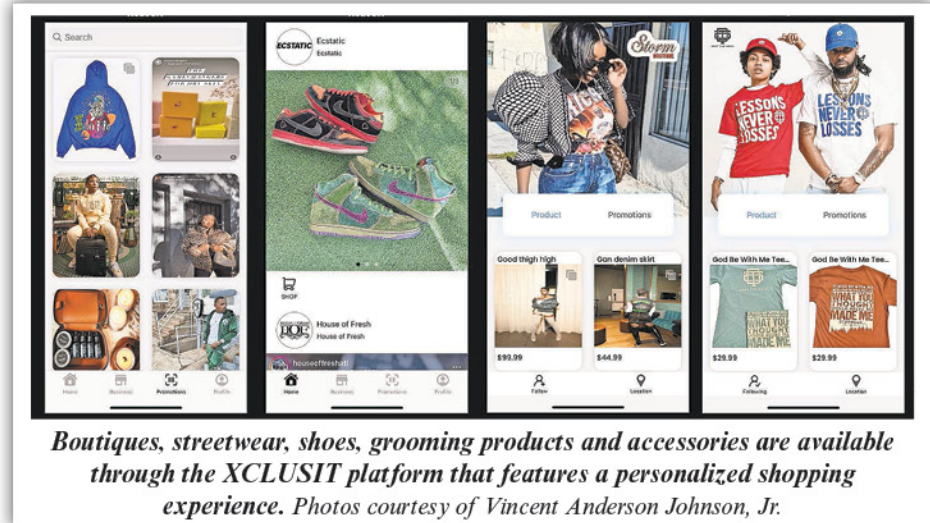
tools to build, grow and scale their business with the Black consumers that are on the XCLUSIT marketplace."

Men and women's boutiques, streetwear, shoe stores, men's and women grooming products and accessories currently comprise the presence of 60 businesses on the platform. Business locations are in the Baltimore and DMV area, Atlanta and Nashville.

Johnson, now a resident of Ellicott City, Maryland, runs the platform full-time. The beta version of the app launched in September of 2023. He has high hopes for XCLUSIT.

"Our goal is to become the world's leading space to shop the genius of culture of Black-owned businesses, as well as remove this idea that Black people don't support Black businesses. I have been an entrepreneur for over 20 years and I would say 80 percent of my customers have been Black people," Johnson said.

He promotes the social marketplace that offers a personalized shopping experience with a spirit of commitment and determination to spread the word. Johnson's in-person efforts include participating in pop-ups on weekends at The Mall in Columbia, located in Columbia, Maryland. While there, the



Boutiques, streetwear, shoes, grooming products and accessories are available through the XCLUSIT platform that features a personalized shopping experience. Photos courtesy of Vincent Anderson Johnson, Jr.

entrepreneur can be found promoting XCLUSIT and his streetwear brand.

Candice Herbon, a resident of Glen Burnie, Maryland, founded Nail Candi Press-On Nails. Her boutique is dedicated to providing press-on nails, affordable accessories and highly competitive pricing, according to nailcandimd.com. Herbon said that she learned about XCLUSIT via pop up promotions at The Mall in Columbia. Her small business is included on XCLUSIT's marketplace. She has been using it since October of 2023.

Herbon explained, "While each initiative of my business is new and exciting, XCLUSIT, has been the most rewarding in boosting sales for my small business. My demographic range has been expanded to include patrons who would've never found my kiosk in Maryland. Thank you, XCLUSIT!"

Despite entrepreneurship's role of bringing joy and excitement to Johnson, he has faced obstacles. When it comes to Blacks in technology, there is still a divide. McKinsey Institute for Black Economic Mobility reported "Black households stand to lose out on more than a cumulative \$350 billion in tech

job wages by 2030, an amount equal to one-tenth the total wealth held by those households."

With an expected, growing wage gap in tech roles, Johnson's independent path to develop technology is noteworthy.

"Being 'Black in Tech' has many challenges, from raising capital to being respected as a Black founder in tech, but I think the most challenging is bootstrapping and having a bug in your app and trying to figure out where the money is coming from to fix the bugs, so that the app runs smoothly for the customer experience," Johnson said.

He mentioned that growth remains on the horizon. The ability to show the diversity and genius of Black-owned brands is a powerful and rewarding fuel to the entrepreneur who aspires to show the world the diversity, creativity and genius of Black-owned brands.

"Chat features are coming on the app, and we will expand into food and services in 2024," Johnson said. "Our goal is to get to 100k downloads by fourth quarter of next year."

Download the XCLUSIT app at <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/xclusit/id1603494882>.



## Baltimore City Residents' Business Provides Plant-based Meals, Herbal Remedies

By Andrea Blackstone

The holiday season is upon us, but healthy holiday food options, or catering needs any time of year do not have to be bland or boring. Although vegan food does not include any animal food products, food lovers can still create a list of their favorite places to eat.

Vegan friendly foodies who have not tried Hue Café & Apothecary in Owings Mills, Maryland may want to give plant-based eating a try.

“Our cafe is only 100% vegan,” said Ejama McNeill, cofounder of the business. “Everything is cooked from scratch and prepared to order.”

Bold flavors, delicious menu options, savory greens, sweet potato pies and stuffed acorn squash are popular plant-based food options that can be found at the family-owned establishment. The most popular dishes are Hue Wings, Shrimp Po Boy and Chic’N Fungi.

A year ago, a patron and Google reviewer who discovered the “little gem” stated that the food options were great.

“I wanted to try everything. Ended up trying the power bowl and cauliflower wings. Wings were spicy! Bowl was scrumptious and filling—especially juicy tomatoes and some delightful herbs,” the customer said, ending with a thumbs up sign and a statement that he would add the establishment to the Baltimore vegan restaurant rotation.

Whether cauliflower wings and collard greens are mentioned, or shrimp tacos and mushroom linguini were up for discussion, the majority of online reviews seem to root for returning to Hue Café & Apothecary.

The growth of Black veganism is on the rise, according to a 2016 Pew Research Center Survey. Prevention of animal suffering, environmental advantages that connect to reduction of



*Aaron McNeill, co-founder of Hue Café & Apothecary. Photo credit: Kelly Finch- Kfinch Photography*

the need to grow food for farmed animals and health benefits that entail replacing less healthy foods with nutrient-rich options are three main reasons people go vegan, according to [vegan.com](http://vegan.com).

Additionally, some individuals dabble in veganism part-time. Global movements like global Meatless Monday advocate for and provide resources to support friends and families to reduce meat consumption. Participants become more exposed to plant-based meal options by skipping meat once a week.

Although vegan dining options have improved, consumers could use more options.

Ejama and Aaron McNeill, co-founders of Hue Café & Apothecary, created an intersection of plant-based foods, natural medicine and health and wellness.

“Offering a full vegan menu while using culinary innovation, we provide ‘from scratch’ cooking and premium herbal essentials for supporting a sustainable lifestyle,” said Ejama, while explaining that the apothecary houses a large variety of natural medicine.

The chief operating officer, brand strategist, herbalist and curator of the tea experience has a passion for health. Cold and hot tea can also be purchased



*Ejama McNeill, co-founder of Hue Café & Apothecary. Photo credit: Kelly Finch- Kfinch Photography*

at Hue Café & Apothecary. Ejama is also an herbalist, certified doula, wife, mother and public speaker. Aaron, the restaurateur, business concept consultant and father is also Ejama’s husband who is the driving force behind the successful café.

“His expertise in the restaurant industry has allowed us to carve out a lane of our own,” Ejama said.

The McNeills have benefited from healthier eating in their own lives, too. The couple lost over 250 pounds collectively, according to Aaron.

“My wife Ejama is vegan/vegetarian. Me, on the other hand, I am not vegan, but I am very health conscious as to what I choose to consume,” he said. “We are living proof that more mindful eating can reverse diseases, contribute to weight loss and improve overall health and wellness.”

However, Aaron stated that more than half of their business customers are not vegan.

Ejama stated that she and Aaron were inspired to start their journey after she lost her mother to cardiovascular disease in 2016. Ejama began a year-long commitment to swap out processed foods for fruit and vegetables and over-the-counter prescription drugs for holistic remedies. She took another step



*Chic’N Fungi  
Photo credit: Ejama McNeill*

by studying the ancient art of herbal medicine.

Aaron, who has worked in every sector of the hospitality industry, learned to incorporate new ways of enjoying fresh food, free of harsh chemicals and overly processed ingredients. The couple became obsessed with eating colorful fruits and vegetables.

The ongoing mission of eating healthier extended beyond the McNeill family. Looking back, Ejama and Aaron have come a long way.

“Hue Cafe & Apothecary was founded and operating in August 2019. We opened the doors to our brick and mortar on June 19, 2021,” Ejama said. “Hue Café & Apothecary owns a food truck which made its debut at The Vegan Soul Fest in 2022.”

Gift cards are available online for purchase and in-store.

Visit [www.huecafeandapothecary.com](http://www.huecafeandapothecary.com) to obtain more information about Hue Café & Apothecary. It is located at 10210 S. Dolfield Road in Owings Mills, Maryland.



## Officials Find Encouraging Surge in Life Expectancy Among Black Americans

By Stacy M. Brown

NNPA Newswire Senior National Correspondent

@StacyBrownMedia

The latest findings on life expectancy in the United States from the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) underscored a noteworthy upswing for the African American population in 2022. With the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic continuing, the NCHS has highlighted the positive strides in health outcomes, particularly for Black Americans.

The comprehensive report utilizes provisional vital statistics data for 2022, providing crucial insights into the nation's health landscape. Notably, life expectancy at birth for the entire U.S. population increased, reaching 77.5 years in 2022—a significant rise of 1.1 years from the

preceding year. The positive trend is reflected in both genders, with males experiencing a 1.3-year increase (74.8 years) and females seeing a rise of 0.9 years (80.2 years).

The report also highlighted the marked improvement in life expectancy for the Black non-Hispanic population. The data indicated a substantial increase of 1.6 years, elevating life expectancy from 71.2 in 2021 to 72.8 in 2022. Health officials said that represents a step towards narrowing historical disparities but also signals a promising shift in health outcomes for Black Americans.

The report attributed a significant portion (84.2%) of the overall increase in life expectancy to decreases in mortality due to COVID-19. Other contributors include reductions in mortality related to heart disease (3.6%), unintentional injuries

(2.6%), cancer (2.2%), and homicide (1.5%). However, the gains could have been more pronounced if not for counterbalancing increases in mortality due to influenza and pneumonia (25.5%), perinatal conditions (21.5%), kidney disease (13.0%), nutritional deficiencies (12.6%), and congenital malformations (5.9%). While the report paints an optimistic picture of health improvements, it emphasizes that the upswing in life expectancy doesn't fully offset the 2.4-year loss observed between 2019 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Racial and ethnic disparities persist, with the white non-Hispanic advantage over the Black non-Hispanic population decreasing by 14.5% from 2021 (5.5 years) to 2022 (4.7).

"There appears to have been some recovery from covid, but we still have a way to go," William Schaffner, an

infectious-disease physician at the Vanderbilt University School of Medicine, told the Washington Post.

"Covid remains with us and continues to put people in the hospital, and have a substantial mortality rate associated with it, particularly among older people and people who are immunocompromised," Schaffner said. Schaffner added that the lingering effects of the pandemic and other health challenges provide a reminder that the United States needs to continue its comprehensive childhood vaccination program, which typically requires children to be immunized before attending school. "And now we have a slow erosion of that, with increasing vaccine skepticism and more and more parents withholding their children from comprehensive vaccination," Schaffner said. "We don't want to erode these very successful preventive health initiatives."

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# Ten City

Continued from page 8

for men, women and children were given away. Remarkable strides were made in Baltimore. The Pastor also acknowledged the support of his staff and 300 local volunteers.

Another highlight included free workshops such as an expungement clinic; Seven Steps to Government Contracts; Unlocking the Power of AI; For your Small Business; Pathway to Prosperity were among the diverse offerings. Wealth building principles, economic transformation, youthpreneur, entrepreneurship and other business and entrepreneurial sessions were also held.

A motivational environment was supported through the presence and messages shared by real life achievers. Dr. Deloris Thomas, president of

Joseph Business School; and Ray Lewis, former Baltimore Ravens linebacker, 2x Super Bowl Champion, and Pro Football Hall of Famer were among them. They worked to activate hidden potential and inspire attendees to start or grow their businesses. A Building Wealth Masterclass Series featured several panels. The purpose was to help small business owners and entrepreneurs find their next level of success.

Operation Ten City includes young people. Pastor David also remarked that the intent of the 2-day program was to inform and provide inspiration to all the participants, especially the youth. Baltimore City Schools were provided transportation to enable some of their students to attend the event. Middle and high school students from surrounding area schools, and churches attended a half-day Youthpreneur Workshop on

Friday, November 17. Camera bundles, college scholarships, gift cards, iPads, Mac computers, iPods, free lunches and t-shirts with "GREATNESS UNLOCKED" inscribed on them were given away to youth participants who attended a youth entrepreneurial workshop.

"During the entrepreneurship session, students participated in interactive lessons on social media content creation, influence, marketing and more. The workshop aimed to impart seeds of entrepreneurial education, wealth-building and ownership in the lives of youth to empower and equip them with the knowledge to make sound choices for their futures," per information provided in a press release.

Another highlight entailed allowing local entrepreneurs to have the opportunity to showcase their business products and services that have the

potential for commercialization and scalability to solve real problems in the marketplace or community. During The Business Pitch Competition that was similar to ABC's "Shark Tank," 10 local finalists pitched their business for three minutes.

Cash prizes were awarded to the three highest-rated contestants. Baltimore's top winners were: Tierra Lathan, Consult Lemonade (first prize, \$10,000); Da'Shon Forrest, Clown N Around Entertainment Firm (second prize, \$5,000); and Joseph Johnson, ManUp (third prize, \$2,500).

It is noteworthy to mention that Baltimore had the second highest attendance of all Operation Ten City campaigns to date, according to a press release. More stops in cities across the United States will occur through the end of 2024. If you would like to learn more about Operation Ten City, please visit [www.operationtencity.com](http://www.operationtencity.com).

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## Add Fibroid Checks to Your Women's Wellness Checklist

By Andrea Blackstone

Educating ourselves about fibroids can raise awareness for women who may struggle with managing bothersome symptoms.

Cynthia M. Wesley, MD (“Dr. Cyn”), a board-certified OBGYN, reminded that they are usually benign overgrowths of the uterus. Fibroids, which are also called leiomyomas, are the most common benign pelvic tumor in women. The risk of a fibroid being cancerous is less than 0.8%, according to the OGBYN. However, fibroids can present challenges.

**Q: Where do fibroids appear?**

**A:** Fibroids can appear on the outside surface of the uterus (subserosal); having [attached] from a stalk on the outside of the uterus (pedunculated); in the body of the uterus (intramural); or within the internal lining of the uterus (submucosal). There are occasions when a fibroid can traverse more than one location.

**Q: What causes fibroids?**

**A:** The cause of fibroids is unknown. However, there is a genetic component to the development of fibroids.

**Q: Why do they develop during a woman's childbearing years?**

**A:** Fibroids can be stimulated by hormones. When women reach childbearing age, there is an increase in hormones, such as estrogen and progesterone.

**Q: Can fibroids lead to infertility?**

**A:** Fibroids can lead to infertility



*Dr. Cynthia M. Wesley*

*Photo courtesy of Dr. Cynthia M. Wesley*

by increasing a woman's risk for miscarriage secondary to the location of some fibroids. We also see many women undergoing hysterectomy for the treatment of fibroids, which leaves them sterile.

**Q: What can be done to help women with fibroids have successful pregnancies?**

**A:** Preconception counseling is essential. Some women benefit from removal of fibroids prior to attempting pregnancy. For example, a fibroid in the lining of the uterus (submucosal fibroid) may hinder proper implantation of the pregnancy, which can lead to a miscarriage. Submucosal fibroids can be easily removed without cutting on the belly. We are able to slide a scope (hysteroscopy) into the vagina, through the opening of the cervix and resect the fibroid (myomectomy).

**Q: Are African American women more at risk for developing fibroids?**

**A:** African American women are three times more likely to develop fibroids than white women.

Along with the increased prevalence, fibroids in Black women are more severe and less likely to regress after menopause. Fibroids are present in up to 80% of African American women by menopause.

**Q: What are other risk factors for developing fibroids?**

**A:** Other risk factors include a family history of fibroids, obesity, an early start of menses and a high fat diet (especially high intake of red meat). Recent

studies have shown an association with Vitamin D deficiency and an increased fibroid tumor risk.

**Q: What are signs that a woman may have fibroids?**

**A:** Women may experience heavy periods, irregular bleeding, bleeding after sex, pelvic pain and an increased in their abdominal girth.

**Q: What is the best way to deal with them?**

**A:** Only symptomatic or very large fibroids should be treated. Even though asymptomatic fibroids do not warrant treatment, women should consider lifestyle modifications to decrease the occurrence of fibroid growth. Such measures as decreasing red meat, maintaining a healthy weight, and confirming appropriate Vitamin D levels can be beneficial. If women desire hormonal contraception, a progesterone only product, such as the progesterone IUD is ideal.

**Q: When is treatment recommended?**

**A:** Treatment of fibroids is recommended if women are

symptomatic and if the fibroids are very large. Treatment may also be recommended in women desiring pregnancy and a fibroid in the endometrial lining (submucosal fibroid) is noted.

**Q: If removal is recommended, are there any new procedures that are promising?**

**A:** Other than a hysterectomy, there are other surgical options for removal. A myomectomy can be performed by opening the belly (laparotomy), inserting a camera below the belly button (laparoscopic or robotic), or by inserting a camera into the vagina, and through the cervix (hysteroscopy). There are other procedures that can also remove fibroids without any cutting. One procedure is uterine artery embolization. With this procedure, a small wire is passed through the groin, and the blood supply to the fibroids is blocked. With no blood supply, the fibroid will shrink and die. Another approach to removal is focused ultrasound surgery (FUS), which uses sound waves to heat and destroy fibroid tissue. It is important to note that fibroids are usually managed with medications such as progesterone only hormones or NSAIDs [non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs].

**Q: Do fibroids shrink or cause less problems after menopause?**

**A:** When women reach menopause, their estrogen level is markedly decreased. The decreased estrogen level causes the fibroids to shrink. However, African American women have an increased risk for fibroids to persist after menopause.

Learn more about Dr. Cyn's fibroid information platform via <http://www.fightthefibroids.com>.



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## Ravens Refreshed After Much Needed Bye Week

By Tyler Hamilton

The bye week came at a timely moment for the Baltimore Ravens as the injuries have piled up. Six players, including Pro Bowl tight end Mark Andrews are on injured reserve. The much-needed bye week gave others a chance to heal up and rest.

“It seems like they feel good, [and] they’re full of energy, but it’s a long season,” Harbaugh said. “It’s a big challenge, and every one of these games is a really physical type of game. So, our guys can use it. I know other teams had it this week, so we’re the last bye [week], I think. So, everybody will be full on the rest of the way.”

What figures to be a tough stretch of games starts with a test at home on Sunday against the Los Angeles Rams who are in the midst of a three-game win streak.

“We know we have a big challenge in front of us, but we also have a great opportunity,” Ravens head coach John Harbaugh said. “And we’re looking forward to it. We just can’t wait.”

Road games against the Jacksonville Jaguars and San Francisco 49ers precede the final two home games against the Miami Dolphins and archrival, the Pittsburgh Steelers. The Ravens are riding a two-game win streak and now have control of their own destiny over the last five games. If the Ravens win out, they’ll be the top seed in the AFC and the road to the Super Bowl will run through M&T Bank Stadium.

The players are working to avoid the temptation to look too far ahead. Harbaugh wants them to be locked in on what’s ahead of them and take a week-by-week approach.

“I think the guys have a chance to focus in on what’s in front of them. Then, you get that [bye] week to think about it and put it in perspective,”



Lamar Jackson

Photo credit: Kevin Sabitus/Getty Images

Harbaugh said. “Our guys have a good perspective on it. They understand where we’re at, what’s required and what’s possible – the opportunities that are created. They understand that, and I think they’re focused in and locked in and ready to go.”

The Ravens will continue to be without one of their top offensive weapons in Andrews, but Harbaugh once again offered hope that Andrews could return after having ankle surgery last month.

“I’m not ruling out Mark Andrews for the down-the-road future at all. Mark is so darn tough. Mark is one of those guys that really and truly ... You say a guy eats, sleeps and breathes football; that’s Mark Andrews. So,

he’s going to do everything he can to get back down the road,” Harbaugh explained.

With Andrews being out, some have connected veteran tight end Zach Ertz to the Ravens after he was released by the Arizona Cardinals. Harbaugh gave his young tight ends a vote of confidence when asked about possibly signing Ertz.

The Ravens believe they have everything they need on the roster. The defense has played well with Roquan Smith and Justin Madubuike leading the way. Quarterback Lamar Jackson has the offense rolling as well. Baltimore is a legitimate threat to win the Super Bowl this season.

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#### Addenda #3

The Housing Authority of the City of Hagerstown, Maryland, 35 W. Baltimore Street, Hagerstown, MD 21740 will receive bids from qualified, responsible contractors until 10:00AM current time, Thursday, December 14, 2023, for the Potomac Towers Sliding Glass Door Replacements Project at 11 W. Baltimore Street, Hagerstown, MD 21740. Potomac Towers is a 14-story, high-rise building, housing 326 residential units. Anticipate award of contract to successful contractor by mid-January 2024. Construction period will be discussed once the contract is awarded. The actual construction start date will be established by mutual agreement between the owner and the contractor. Davis-Bacon wages for Washington County, Maryland and Liquidated Damages apply to this solicitation.

Electronic drawings and specifications are available upon request. Contact Dawn Braganier, Modernization Coordinator, at telephone 301-733-6911 Ext. 168 or email: [dbraganier@hagerstownha.com](mailto:dbraganier@hagerstownha.com) for bid documents.

Sean Griffith  
Contract Officer

E.E.O.

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## Legal Notice

## Legal Notice

## Legal Notice

## Legal Notice

CITY OF BALTIMORE  
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS  
OFFICE OF ENGINEERING AND CONSTRUCTION  
NOTICE OF LETTING

Sealed Bids or Proposals, in duplicate addressed to the Board of Estimates of the Mayor and City Council of Baltimore and marked for **WATER CONTRACT NO. 1243-Cromwell Pumping Station Improvements** will be received at the Office of the Comptroller, Room 204 City Hall, Baltimore, Maryland until 11:00 A.M. on **January 24, 2024**. Positively no bids will be received after 11:00 A.M. Bids will be publicly opened by the Board of Estimates and can be watched live on CharmTV's cable channel 25/1085HD; charmtv/baltimore.com/watch-live or listen in at (443) 984-1696 (ACCESS CODE: 0842939) from City Hall at Noon. The Contract Documents may be examined, without charge, at Contract Administration 4 South Frederick Street Baltimore, Maryland 21202 on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor (410) 396-4041 as of **December 8, 2023**, and copies may be purchased for a non-refundable cost of **150.00**. **Conditions and requirements of the Bid are found in the bid package.** All contractors bidding on this Contract must first be prequalified by the City of Baltimore Contractors Qualification Committee. Interested parties should call (410) 396-6883 or contact OBC at 4 S Frederick St., 4<sup>th</sup> Floor, Baltimore, MD 21202. **If a bid is submitted by a joint venture ("JV"), then in that event, the document that established the JV shall be submitted with the bid for verification purposes.** The Prequalification Category required for bidding on this project is **E13003 Water and/or Sewer Treatment Plants and Pumping Stations**. Cost Qualification Range for this work shall be **\$60,000,000.01 to \$70,000,000.00**.

A "Pre-Bidding Information" session will be conducted Virtually. Vendor can access this Microsoft Teams, Meeting ID: 261 190 264 017 Passcode: NoCrCO. Vendor can attend by Phone with Phone Conference ID: 628 163 297# on 1-443-948-6058 on **December 14, 2023 at 10:00 AM.**

A site visit to Cromwell Pumping Station will be conducted on **December 19, 2023**, at 10:00 A.M. For any bid questions, please contact Mr. Farid Sikander at [farid.sikander@baltimorecity.gov](mailto:farid.sikander@baltimorecity.gov). Contractor questions shall be submitted (In Writing Only) by **January 5, 2024**.

To purchase a bid book, please make an electronic request at: [https://publicworks.baltimorecity.gov/dpw-construction-projects-notice-letting\\_and\\_dpwbidopportunities@baltimorecity.gov](https://publicworks.baltimorecity.gov/dpw-construction-projects-notice-letting_and_dpwbidopportunities@baltimorecity.gov). For further inquiries about purchasing bid documents, please contact the assigned Contract Administrator [Doreen.diamond@baltimorecity.gov](mailto:Doreen.diamond@baltimorecity.gov)

**Principal items of work for this contract include, but are not limited to:** Principal Items of work for this contract include, but not limited to; demolition of structure and equipment of first floor of pumping station; demolition of pumping systems (A to D) and associated existing piping and appurtenances; demolition of isolation valves, venturi meters, and surge release valves outside of the pumping station; demolition of existing electric substation; construction of new pumping station, electrical building, and hypochlorite room and installation of new equipment; construction of new electrical power supply and distribution systems; construction of new emergency generator with enclosure, switchgear with walk-in enclosure, and transformers; miscellaneous site grading and improvements.

The MBE goal is **4.0**  
The WBE goal is **1.5%**

APPROVED:  
Clerk, Board of Estimates

APPROVED:  
Richard J. Luna  
Interim Director  
Department of Public Works

CITY OF BALTIMORE  
DEPARTMENT OF RECREATION AND PARKS  
NOTICE OF LETTING

Sealed Bids or Proposals, in duplicate addressed to the Board of Estimates of the Mayor and City Council of Baltimore and marked for **BALTIMORE CITY NO. RP23889 GARDENVILLE RECREATION CENTER** will be received at the Office of the Comptroller, Room 204 City Hall, Baltimore, Maryland until 11:00 A.M. **January 24, 2024**. Positively no bids will be received after 11:00 A.M. Bids will be publicly opened by the Board of Estimates in Room 215, City Hall at Noon. The proposed Contract Documents may be examined, without charge, at the Dept. of Rec & Parks at 2600 Madison Ave, Baltimore, Md. 21217 by appointment only on Mondays - Fridays, 8:30am - 4:00pm by emailing [benitaj.randolph@baltimorecity.gov](mailto:benitaj.randolph@baltimorecity.gov) as of **December 8, 2023** and copies may be purchased for a non-refundable cost of **\$200.00**. **Conditions and requirements of the Bid are found in the bid package.** All contractors bidding on this Contract must first be prequalified by the City of Baltimore Contractors Qualification Committee. Interested parties should call (410) 396-6883 or contact the Committee at 4 South Frederick Street, 4th Floor, Baltimore, Maryland 21202. **If a bid is submitted by a joint venture ("JV"), then in that event, the document that established the JV shall be submitted with the bid for verification purposes.** The Prequalification Category required for bidding on this project is **E13001 Three Story and Under**. Cost Qualification Range for this work shall be **\$12,000,000.00 to \$17,000,000.00**. A "MANDATORY Pre-Bidding Information" session will be conducted via Microsoft Teams at **10:30 A.M.** on **December 14, 2023**. Email your contact information to [sharvari.subramaniam@baltimorecity.gov](mailto:sharvari.subramaniam@baltimorecity.gov) to receive an invite to the Microsoft Team (video conference meeting) no later than December 13, 2023 at 9:00am. Principal Items of work for this project are Removal of site improvements, Earthwork, Underground utilities, Storm water facilities, New One-Story Building, New Site Amenities including a Loop walk, Playground, Landscaping, & Hardscaping. The MBE goal is **13.85%** and WBE goal is **4.23%**.  
**APPROVED: M. Celeste Amato, Clerk, Board of Estimates**

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