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Amtrak Celebrates Completion of New Baltimore Platform Construction



(L-R) MTA Administrator, Holly Arnold; MDOT Secretary, Paul Wiedefeld; Baltimore Mayor, Brandon Scott; U.S. Senator Chris Van Hollen; Amtrak President, Roger Harris; FRA Representative, Deputy Jennifer Mitchell; and U.S. Senator Ben Cardin gather for a ribbon cutting to inaugurate a newly constructed boarding platform at Baltimore Penn Station. The new boarding platform will provide over 1,000 linear feet of space, including pedestrian pathways and new elevators for ADA accessibility. It is scheduled to begin serving trains this spring. (See article on page 6) Photo courtesy of AMTRAK

CIAA Leaders, Partners Preview Upcoming Hoops Tournament

By Demetrius Dillard

Executives and officials from the Central Intercollegiate Athletic Conference, community partners and sponsors provided a glimpse of what to expect in the much-anticipated 2024 CIAA Basketball Tournament during an introductory press conference at Under Armour’s headquarters in South Baltimore on Jan. 25, 2024.

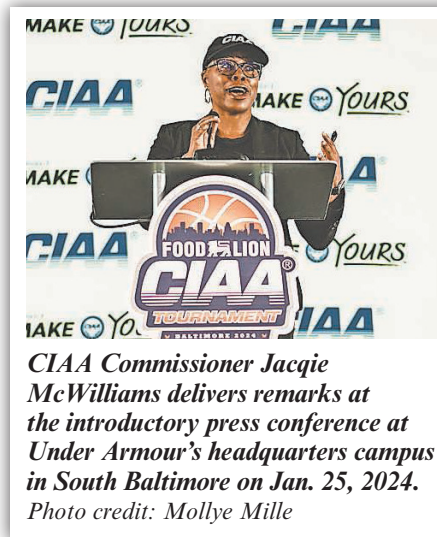
This year marks the 79th anniversary of the CIAA Basketball Tournament and the third year that Baltimore has hosted the event. The core and focus of the tournament are to celebrate student-athletes, CIAA Commissioner Jacqie McWilliams-Parker said, giving additional details on festivities, new initiatives and featured events throughout tournament week.

“It’s not just a CIAA Tournament. It truly is an event where basketball is the center of all that we do,” McWilliams-Parker said.

“It’s not just our institutions. We want the city of Baltimore to feel like it’s yours. You gotta own it as much as we do wherever we go. We can run a championship anywhere, but when you come to a city that really invests in the tournament, and you see it as your own, it makes our community and family stronger.”

Tournament Week, which will run from Monday, Feb. 26, to Sunday, March 3, 2024 will feature a Fan Fest, High School Education Day, CIAA Career Expo, Health and Wellness Summit, Super Saturday, Diversity & Inclusion Town Hall, John B. McClendon Jr. Hall of Fame Breakfast and more.

Once again, Bowie State University will serve as the host institution. BSU President Aminta Breaux was among the dignitaries at the introductory press conference. Echoing McWilliams-Parker’s remarks, Breaux emphasized the importance of the tournament beyond basketball competition.



CIAA Commissioner Jacqie McWilliams delivers remarks at the introductory press conference at Under Armour’s headquarters campus in South Baltimore on Jan. 25, 2024.
Photo credit: Mollye Mille

“Bowie State University is thrilled to host the tournament,” Breaux said.

“We will have events on our campus leading up to the CIAA, and what a great week it’s going to be when we arrive here.”

Prior to coming back to Baltimore, the tournament was held in Charlotte, North Carolina for 15 years. Last year, the event brought a \$29.6 million impact to Baltimore, according to Visit Baltimore CEO and President Al Hutchinson. Though he lauded the economic impact the 2023 had on the city and its Black-owned businesses, Hutchinson said that inspiring the next generation of CIAA students was just as – if not, more – important.

“Basketball is the backdrop... but we should be celebrating excellence, and giving hope and opportunity to young folks who sometimes don’t have that,” he said.

“You can bounce a basketball, throw a football, but you won’t do that forever. What you can do is be impactful on some person. So join us in this; it’s way bigger than basketball to me.”

As part of the CIAA’s multi-year partnership with ESPN, all of the tournament’s 26 games will be broadcast exclusively on ESPN+ (<https://plus.espn.com/>) with the championship games



From left: Visit Baltimore CEO and President Al Hutchinson; Jolisa Williams, Associate Athletic Director for External Operations and Strategic Engagement; Winston-Salem State University Athletic Director Etienne Thomas; Kristen Riley, vice president of operations at Food Lion; CIAA Commissioner Jacqie McWilliams; Tchernavia Rocker, chief people and administrative officer at Under Armour; Michael Saunders, owner of Matriarch Coffee in downtown Baltimore; and Clyde Doughty Jr., Vice President for Intercollegiate Athletics and Recreation at Bowie State. Photo credit: Mollye Mille

appearing on ESPNU.

This is a special year of celebration for the CIAA as it marks the 50th Anniversary of NCAA Division II. It is also the 20th Anniversary of the Mister and Miss CIAA Scholarship Competition and the tournament’s Ball Girl/Ball Boy Program.

A fixture of tournament week, the Ball Girl/Boy program is a unique initiative that puts local youth directly in the middle of the action throughout tournament week, according to a CIAA release.

“The CIAA Basketball Championship Tournament is a precursor to March Madness, and also intentionally falls during the last week in February, Black History Month,” says a statement released by the conference last week.

“As one of the country’s top 10 cities with the highest percentage of Black or African-American residents, one that honors and amplifies Black culture, Baltimore is the perfect destination for the CIAA Tournament.”

Before returning to Baltimore in 2022, the CIAA Tournament was last held in the city in 1952 before bouncing around

in different venues throughout Virginia and North Carolina for the next 70 years.

“The CIAA Men’s & Women’s Basketball Tournament is a culmination of the hard work of our member institutions and our student-athletes, as well as a celebration of HBCU culture and community,” added McWilliams-Parker, who’s been commissioner of the conference since 2012.

“Through our relationships with partners like ESPN, Food Lion, Under Armour and others, we can continue to provide opportunities and access for the next generation.”

Other speakers at the press conference were Tonia Walker, CIAA’s senior associate commissioner for strategic marketing and external operations; Tchernavia Rocker, chief people and administrative officer at Under Armour; Kristen Riley, vice president of operations at Food Lion; Maryland Sports Commission Executive Director Terry Hasseltine; Michael Saunders, owner of Matriarch Coffee in downtown Baltimore; and Winston-Salem State University Athletic Director Etienne Thomas.

CIAA MEN'S & WOMEN'S BASKETBALL TOURNAMENT

FEB 26 – MAR 3 • CFG BANK ARENA IN BALTIMORE



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The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on the Health of Black Americans: Opportunities and Challenges



Jayne Hopson
Courtesy Photo

By Jayne Hopson

Black History Month shines brightest when it is equal parts recognition of the past, coupled with a thoughtful consideration of the future. A look at Artificial Intelligence (AI) gives a snapshot of extraordinary technological advancements that will bring significant changes to nearly every area of our lives, including healthcare.

For Black Americans, AI offers promising advancements in technology-driven diagnosis and data-based delivery of care. However, it may also create new challenges for underserved populations, placing Black patients at an increased risk for diminished care, due to biases in data entry, privacy concerns, and exposure to inadequate cultural competency.

Casting an eye to the future, HealthBeat considers ways AI has the potential to transform the delivery of health care for African Americans. By leveraging AI-driven diagnostics and personalized treatment plans, healthcare providers can offer more accurate and efficient services. For example, one of the most widely adapted applications is telemedicine.

The pandemic's tsunami of physical barriers to acute and chronic treatment contributed to the rise in telehealth visits. In the aftermath of COVID-19, telemedicine has become an increasingly vital and accepted source of care. Telehealth is credited with increasing access in underserved communities.

AI-powered telemedicine platforms can facilitate remote consultations, allowing patients who might otherwise face barriers to accessing care due to location, transportation, or financial constraints, to receive timely medical advice and treatment. The benefits are many. Patients can receive care without finding a babysitter, taking time off from work, paying for transportation, or miss giving grandma her afternoon medication.

Health disparities have long been a critical issue within Black communities in America. AI presents a unique opportunity to address these inequalities. By analyzing extensive healthcare datasets, AI algorithms can identify patterns and trends that contribute to disparities in healthcare delivery and outcomes.

This data-driven approach can inform policies and interventions aimed at closing the gap in healthcare quality and access between Black Americans and other populations. However, the use of AI in healthcare is not without significant risks.

One of the most concerning is the potential for AI to perpetuate, or even exacerbate, racial biases. If AI systems are trained on datasets that lack diversity or contain biases, they may produce outcomes that are unfairly skewed against Black Americans.

This risk underscores the need for diverse, representative training data and continuous monitoring of AI algorithms to ensure they do not reinforce existing disparities. This presents an opportunity to promote the importance of Black

mentoring programs. Formalized programs and curriculum are needed to identify the best and brightest young Black students for mentorship, at the earliest possible age.

AI can be a powerful tool in public health research, particularly in identifying risk factors and trends specific to Black communities. This information is necessary to develop targeted and effective health interventions, leading to better health outcomes. For instance, AI can help in understanding the prevalence and impact of certain diseases that disproportionately affect Black Americans, enabling healthcare providers to tailor their approach accordingly.

AI-driven platforms can also play a crucial role in health education and awareness. By providing relevant information and programs, these platforms can address specific health challenges faced by Black Americans. This approach can promote preventive care and encourage individuals to take an active role in managing their health.

The integration of AI in healthcare raises important questions about data privacy and security. Black communities, often more vulnerable to data misuse, need assurance that their personal health information is protected. Ensuring robust data protection measures and transparent data handling practices are essential in building trust and safeguarding privacy.



Photo credit: Shutterstock

All stakeholders will need to be involved in the policy-making process to ensure fairness and diversity.

Developing AI systems with cultural competency is a nonnegotiable requirement. These systems must be designed to understand and respect the cultural nuances and needs of Black Americans. Failing to do so could result in ineffective or insensitive healthcare delivery, undermining the potential benefits of AI.

AI has the potential to transform healthcare for Black Americans, offering improved access, quality, and targeted interventions. However, this potential can only be realized if the challenges of bias, data privacy, workforce impact, and cultural competency are addressed.

It is important that AI systems are developed with a deep understanding of the diverse needs of Black communities, ensuring that the benefits of AI in healthcare are equitably distributed. With careful development, implementation, and regulation, AI can be a powerful tool in advancing the health and well-being of Black Americans.

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Technology and You

We are MORE in 2024 - Part Three of a Three-Part Series: Mining Opportunities for Resilient Employment

By Karen Clay
Clay Technology and
Multimedia, L.L.C.



Karen Clay,
Clay Technology
and Multimedia
Courtesy,
Karen Clay

This is the last of a three-part series, focused on Mining Opportunities for Resilient Employment in 2024. In my last two articles, I wrote about the broad opportunities available in the Information Technology (IT) industry, provided some potentially helpful resources to guide you, and focused on three of the six broad categories of IT employment opportunities.

Today, I will focus on the last three of these categories which include (1) Software and Application Development; (2) Data Management and Analytics; and (3) Design, Development and User Experience. As with the previous three categories, the average starting salary for jobs in these categories ranges from 60K – 80K dollars, depending on the specific industry, location, experience, and qualifications of the applicant. Below are listed some of the top positions in each of them, along with the basic skills to be eligible for hire. If you want to look further into these areas, included are some resources that provide additional information, community resources, and/or free training to further your knowledge about your potential focus or interest:

1. Software and Application Development:

a. Software Developer/Engineer: Focuses on designing, developing, and implementing software solutions. A bachelor's degree in computer science or a related field is preferred, along with familiarity with programming languages such as Java, C++, or Python.

b. Mobile Application Developer:

Specializes in creating applications for mobile platforms like iOS and Android. A bachelor's degree in computer science or related fields, with knowledge of mobile development languages like Swift (for iOS) or Kotlin (for Android) are minimal requirements. Demonstrated experience in developing successful mobile

apps, however, can be helpful, especially in securing a higher salary. A person with a high school diploma and demonstrated experience may be able to obtain employment for entry-level positions or at start-up companies which may prioritize skills over formal education.

c. DevOps Engineer: Bridges the gap between software development and operations, focusing on continuous integration and deployment. A bachelor's degree in computer science, IT, or related fields. Certifications like AWS Certified DevOps Engineer, Microsoft Certified: Azure DevOps Engineer Expert, or Docker Certified Associate can be beneficial.

2. Data Management and Analytics:

a. Data Scientist: Analyzes and interprets complex digital data to assist in decision-making. A bachelor's or master's degree in data science, statistics, Mathematics, or related fields is beneficial. Knowledge of data analysis tools like Python, R, or SQL is essential.

b. Data Analyst: Transforms data into insights that drive business value. A bachelor's degree in data science, statistics, computer science, or a related field is preferred, along with proficiency in data analysis tools and software.

c. Database Administrator (DBA): Responsible for the performance, integrity, and security of databases.

A bachelor's degree in computer science or related fields is helpful. Certifications like Oracle Database Administrator Certified Professional or Microsoft SQL Server database certifications are beneficial and can result in a higher starting salary.

3. Design Development and User Experience:

a. UI/UX Designer: Designs user interfaces and experiences to ensure software usability. A bachelor's degree in design, computer science, or a related field is preferred. Knowledge of design software like Adobe Creative Suite and a strong portfolio is often essential.

b. Front-end Developer: Focuses on the development of visual elements and user experience of a software application. A bachelor's degree in computer science or related fields, along with proficiency in HTML, CSS, JavaScript, and frameworks like React or Angular are helpful.

c. Graphic Designer (Digital): Creates visual concepts using software to communicate ideas that inspire, inform, and captivate consumers. A bachelor's degree in graphic design or related fields is preferred. Proficiency in graphic design software like Adobe Illustrator or Photoshop and a strong portfolio is crucial.

As with the other job categories, these roles also require a combination of education, practical experience, and in many cases, specific certifications. With the advent and growth of new areas such as Artificial Intelligence and Augmented Reality, the opportunities to succeed in IT are limitless. HBCUs such as Morgan State, Bowie State, Coppin State, and University of Maryland Eastern Shore all offer degrees in the technology field, along with other colleges and universities in the area. The key is to arm yourself with knowledge relative to your area of interest and take those steps toward your goal.

Amtrak Celebrates Completion of New Baltimore Platform Construction

New Boarding Platform Five to Open This Spring at Baltimore Penn Station

BALTIMORE – Amtrak representatives and stakeholders gathered today with state, local and federal officials for a ribbon cutting to inaugurate a newly constructed boarding platform at Baltimore Penn Station. The new platform is scheduled to begin serving trains this spring. This project is part of Amtrak's overall redevelopment of Baltimore Penn Station, a \$150 million investment to improve customer experience and grow passenger rail.

“As we work to redevelop Baltimore Penn Station and enhance the customer experience, this new platform will help ease rail congestion and reduce delays on the Northeast Corridor,” said Amtrak President Roger Harris. “Amtrak ridership continues to grow, and this new platform will help us build future capacity while also improving operational flexibility.”

Baltimore Penn Station is the eighth busiest station on the Amtrak network, with more than three million Amtrak and MARC passengers moving through the facility each year. Over the past year, Amtrak ridership increased 29 percent in Baltimore, surpassing the 24 percent growth in Amtrak ridership nationwide.

Customer Benefits

The new boarding platform will provide over 1,000 linear feet of space, including pedestrian pathways and new elevators for ADA accessibility. The project also includes a renovated headhouse, roofing and historical restoration of the columns and canopies for each of the platforms.

Operational Benefits

This new high-level platform will offer Amtrak more operational flexibility. When other platforms that high-speed trains typically use are already occupied,



L - R: Brian Traylor, Beth Toll, Tiara Brooks, Angelia Rice, Margaret Clark, Jane Brophy. Photo courtesy of AMTRACK

the new platform will be available for passengers to board or disembark.

Looking Ahead

This new platform is one of two being built at Baltimore Penn Station. The second platform is scheduled for completion in Fall 2024. These two new high-level platforms will support Amtrak's expansion of high-speed train service with new *Acela* trains scheduled to debut later this year.

Reactions:

Jennifer Mitchell, FRA Deputy Administrator

“Renovations and upgrades at Baltimore Penn Station, including the new boarding platform just finished, will modernize a historic hub for Baltimore residents and along the Northeast Corridor, helping to accommodate future ridership growth at one of Amtrak's busiest stations,” said FRA Deputy Administrator Jennifer Mitchell. “The Federal Railroad Administration is proud to support work at Baltimore Penn Station and beyond as we invest billions from President Biden's

Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to advance projects of national significance in Maryland, like replacing the B&P Tunnel, Bush River Bridge, Gunpowder River Bridge, and Susquehanna River Rail Bridge.”

Senator Ben Cardin (D-MD)

“It's an exciting day for the millions of riders who use Baltimore Penn Station as a connection to the greater Eastern Seaboard. The additional platform will provide better, more efficient service in one of the busiest passenger rail stations in the country,” said Senator Cardin. “Amtrak and its partners in Maryland with support from the Biden-Harris Administration's historic investment in transportation infrastructure is laying the foundation for the future of modern rail in Maryland.”

Senator Chris Van Hollen (D-MD)

“Our rail system is essential to keeping Marylanders and our economy moving. This new platform will position Penn Station to better accommodate high-speed trains and increase overall capacity for rail service. This is big news for

the three million riders – Marylanders and visitors alike – who pass through this critical transit hub each year,” said Senator Van Hollen.

Brandon M. Scott, Baltimore Mayor

“Penn Station is a gateway to Charm City through which millions of visitors, commuters, and residents arrive, depart, or pass through every single year,” said Baltimore Mayor Brandon M. Scott. “This new platform, and eventually the broader Penn Station renovation, will breathe new life into the storied train station and provide much-needed upgrades for the convenience, safety, and enjoyment of everyone passing through the station. These upgrades are indicative of all of the exciting development and investment flowing into our city and I am thrilled to have these changes be part of the Baltimore renaissance we're seeing.”

Paul J. Wiedefeld, Maryland Transportation Secretary

“Amtrak's new platform at Baltimore Penn Station will help ease congestion along the Northeast corridor, and improve the safety of our customers and workers,” said Maryland Transportation Secretary Paul J. Wiedefeld. “MDOT is proud to work in close collaboration with our state, local and federal partners to reinvigorate Penn Station and the surrounding community.”

Holly Arnold, Maryland Transit Administrator

“Penn Station is an important hub in MTA's transit network, providing vital, multi-modal connections,” said Maryland Transit Administrator Holly Arnold. “We appreciate Amtrak's partnership in improving mobility and access for all.”

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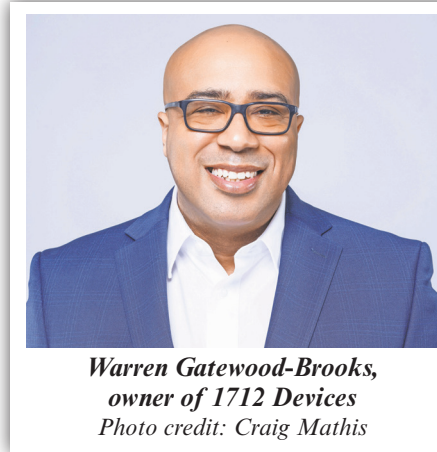
Black-owned Firms in Medical Device Market Partner, Bring Diversity to Orthopedics

By Andrea Blackstone

Warren Gatewood-Brooks, a Baltimore resident and owner of 1712 Devices, a locally owned minority medical device distributor, recently partnered with Orthopedic Sciences Inc. (OSI). In a press release, OSI was described “as a California-based manufacturer of medical products and the only African-American owned orthopedic medical device company in the United States.”

OSI was founded by Dr. James K. Brannon in 1999. He has been practicing orthopedic surgery for 26 years and has been a doctor for 33. Gatewood-Brooks works in the field or remotely while engaging with doctors and healthcare professionals, discussing how they can optimize patient care with the products. Gatewood-Brooks, who earned an undergraduate degree from Morgan State University and an MBA from Florida Institute of Technology, executes sales and marketing tasks on the East Coast.

“This partnership is incredibly significant because it marks a groundbreaking milestone that has never been achieved before, and it’s happening right in our own backyard. Never before have we seen an African American orthopedic device manufacturer and distributor join forces in this manner,” Gatewood-Brooks stated. “OSI stands out as the only African American orthopedic device manufacturer in the United States. Moreover, African Americans represent only 2 percent of the country’s orthopedic professionals, with African American medical device sales representatives comprising just 3 percent of the total industry and an even smaller percentage in orthopedic sales. Our collaboration is a powerful



statement as we come together to offer high-quality products that rival or exceed those of our competitors.”

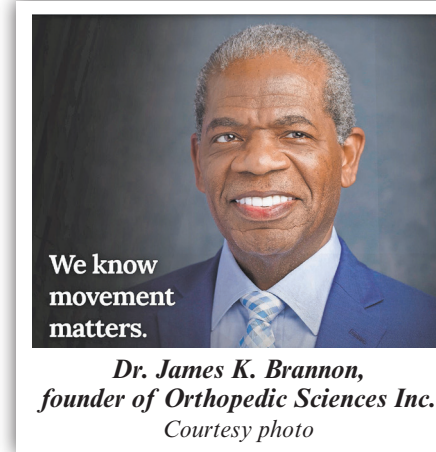
Gatewood-Brooks stated that he had the opportunity to converse with Tim Fitzsimmons, vice president of OSI at length before meeting Dr. Brannon.

“Following several discussions with Dr. Brannon regarding product branding, sales strategies, and the lack of diversity in orthopedics and medical device sales, we concluded that a partnership would be mutually beneficial. As they say, ‘the rest is history,’” Gatewood-Brooks said.

Gatewood-Brooks added, “This partnership not only showcases successful minority professionals in leadership positions but also serves as inspiration for individuals from minority backgrounds to pursue careers in the medical field and entrepreneurship.”

Dr. Brannon said that his medical specialty is orthopedic surgery with a strong emphasis on joint preservation. He treats arthritis of the joints to enable patients to keep the joints that they were born with. Dr. Brannon has filed 38 patents.

“I have invented, designed, developed and manufactured many



devices for the shoulder, hip and knee. The devices comprise titanium implants, surgical instrumentation trays and disposable medical devices. These devices were specifically developed for adults and children with avascular necrosis [a disease marked by the death of bone tissue] due to sickle cell disease or avascular necrosis in children after treatment for leukemia,” Dr. Brannon said.

He added, “OSI’s devices are the only devices in the U.S. that use a patented endoscopically guided technique to remove the dead bone in patients with avascular necrosis. The largest incision required is only 3 CM. Surgical risks are low and pain relief is dramatic.”

Dr. Brannon, a resident of Pullman, Washington, further mentioned that he was inspired to create patents because he enjoys problem-solving, examining a complex matrix and reducing it to its essential elements.

Gatewood-Brooks explained that 1712 Devices is a growing orthopedic medical device distributor specializing in the distribution of sustainable joint preservation products that range from bone graft stabilization to fluid management. Gatewood-Brooks mentioned that Dr. Brannon trains

surgeons in the use of his products and procedures and remains heavily involved in product development.

“I want to emphasize the brilliance of Dr. Brannon and ensure it’s not overlooked because he currently stands as the only one of his kind. Together, we are changing lives, as evidenced by our testimonials.”

Gatewood-Brooks also revealed that the partnership with Dr. Brannon would stimulate economic growth in the region by creating job opportunities and fostering entrepreneurship and collaborating with community partners. Additionally, he and Dr. Brannon partnered with Baltimore City Councilman Robert Stokes of the 12th District and others, because they are aware of the challenges faced by Black and Brown people who are not introduced to STEM subjects early in their academic journeys.

“We eagerly anticipate collaborating with our new community partners, including Dr. Damien Myers of MedReimagined, who is dedicated to empowering young minds in Baltimore. Their mission focuses on creating pathways for scholars from all communities to pursue careers in medicine. I encourage you to visit their website at <https://www.medreimagined.com>,” Gatewood-Brooks said. “Additionally, we are excited to work with Midway Community Development, where executive director Kathy Christian is enthusiastic about launching their STEM initiative. We are fully committed to ensuring their success and providing whatever resources we can to support their endeavors.”

Visit <https://1712devices.com> to learn more about 1712 Devices and OSI’s partnership.

Saluting Four Generations of African American Doctors

By Andrea Blackstone

According to a recent report from the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), a mere 5.7% of physicians identify as Black or African American.

Despite the shortage of Black doctors, Dr. Mary Branch, a Greensboro, North Carolina-based cardiologist is a fourth generation African American doctor. Discrimination and hurdles did not stop her predecessors from displaying Black excellence through a myriad of achievements, including serving others through medicine.

“I’m a part of a family of civil rights activists and people who broke a lot of barriers,” Dr. Branch said. “For me, it’s a service and an honor to continue my family’s legacy but doing it my way.”

Dr. Branch attended an Orthodox Jewish school in Northeast Ohio. Her beginning as a trailblazer foreshadowed her spirit of excellence.

“I wasn’t the first African American student, but I was the first one to go from kindergarten to sixth grade,” Branch said, recalling her primary school years.

Her medical legacy includes Charles Talmadge Kimbrough, born in 1894. He was Virginia Newell’s cousin. Newell is Dr. Branch’s grandmother. Kimbrough attended Syracuse University College of Medicine and practiced internal medicine in New York. His wealth was taken because he died without a will.

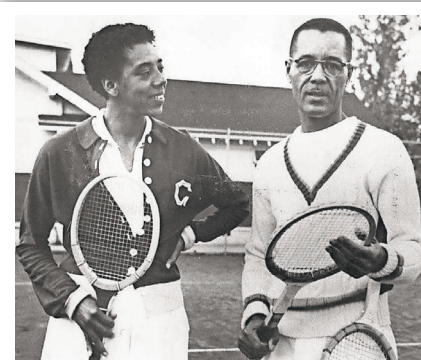
Dr. Leo Kimbrough, a physician of internal medicine, was Dr. Branch’s uncle.

“He went to Belgium and learned French just to get his medical degree. He came back and he struggled with the difficulty of coming back as a WWII vet and also being a physician trying to maintain this practice,” Dr. Branch said.

The family’s next generation included Dr. Hubert Eaton who was her



Dr. Mary Branch (left) graduates in 2013 from medical school at Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine. Her mother, (right) Dr. Virginia Dee Banks, attended the same medical school and graduated in 1974. Courtesy photo



Dr. Mary Branch’s cousin, Dr. Hubert Eaton, (right) worked with Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall to desegregate physician faculty in Wilmington, North Carolina. Dr. Eaton “adopted” Althea Gibson, (left) the Wimbledon tennis star. Courtesy photo



Dr. Leo Kimbrough was Dr. Mary Branch’s uncle. Courtesy photo

grandfather’s first cousin who attended the University of Michigan for medical school and also became an internal medicine physician.

“He moved to Wilmington, North Carolina and fought to desegregate James Walker Memorial Hospital there. It was a hospital for Black patients, but you couldn’t be a Black faculty member on its staff,” Dr. Branch said.

The physician and civil rights activist penned “Every Man Should Try.” Dr. Eaton’s autobiography partially recounted his struggle to attain racial equality and his fight in the medical profession. Dr. Branch further explained that Eaton worked with Supreme Court Justice, Thurgood Marshall to help desegregate the hospital faculty and won.

She pointed out that we do not have a plethora of Thurgood Marshalls.

“So, it’s really hard to continue this legacy, because of all of the other barriers,” Dr. Branch said.

Dr. Branch’s mother Dr. Virginia Dee Banks, now 75, became a doctor, too. She attended Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine

Cleveland, Ohio and graduated in 1974 and became an infectious disease specialist. Branch graduated from the same medical school in 2013.

Dr. Branch added that her mother worked with HIV patients and individuals in the African American community.

“She said some of her attendings [physicians] would not even go in the room, but she went in the room to take care of people.”

Her mother became their advocate and later a COVID patient advocate.

“Even in her 70s, she still wanted to be on the front line. Part of that is because there’s not many African American physicians. So, she feels this need for service because she’s so needed,” Dr. Branch said.

Dr. Branch’s aunt, Dr. Glenda Newell-Harris, the former president of The Links, Incorporated is an internal medicine physician in California.

“She shadowed Uncle Leo and ended up going to California to practice medicine,” Dr. Branch said.

Dr. Branch, a divorced mother of

a young child, continues her family’s legacy in medicine, despite life’s peaks and valleys. She contributes to non-invasive cardiology, taking care of patients with heart disease and its prevention. Her niche and passion is cardio-oncology.

“I’m a big fan of innovation and doing new things because I have always been different and someone who charted different water, just by being who I am, looking biracial, being biracial. I integrated my Jewish school, growing up in Youngstown, Ohio,” Dr. Branch said.

Dr. Branch remarked that women seem to have a different way of thinking and have more empathy. It helps with patient care.

She added, “Patient care is creating a connection to help motivate people to make changes, but if people don’t trust you, they’re not going to change their habits based on what you say. So, I think as women, we can help with that to some degree.”

Dr. Branch wants to be remembered as a resilient person and someone who loves connecting different groups together.

“I want to be remembered as someone who despite it all, chose the positive and who chose love,” Dr. Branch also said.

Pilot Project Filmed in Baltimore, Maryland Set to Tap into Entertainment Market

By Andrea Blackstone

New York may come to mind, when it comes to film and entertainment, but according to the International Trade Administration, “the U.S. Media and Entertainment (M&E) industry is the largest in the world at \$660 billion (of the \$2 trillion market).”

The M & E industry—including streaming content, music, video, audio recordings and even book publishing—can also provide more opportunities and employment for artists, actors and businesses from a broader view that is not only limited to film and television. Underdiscussed areas of benefit when productions come to town include car rentals, hotel patronage and businesses such as food establishments enjoying a financial boost.

A recent Maryland Entertainment Council Preliminary Report mentioned that in 2014, \$25 million in tax credits were authorized to retain the television series “House of Cards” and “VEEP.”

“Those two series combined spent more than \$112 million directly into Maryland’s economy generating an economic impact of \$190 million.”

Maryland wants a piece of the financial pie again.

According to the Maryland Department of Commerce, “the 2023 Legislative Session, the Maryland General Assembly passed, and Governor Wes Moore signed, Chapter 434, Film Production Activity Income Tax Credit Alterations. Among other things, this legislation established the Maryland Entertainment Council (Council).”

The Council is composed of an interdisciplinary group of experts who assess and make recommendations to bolster Maryland’s position in the

globally competitive M&E market.

Among recommendations made by the Maryland Entertainment Council, Maryland was advised to “hire a consultant to examine all tax incentives that specialize in media and entertainment, both nationally and globally.”

Some local or independent film production companies may aspire to play a role in Maryland becoming an attractive destination to build Maryland’s notoriety as a M&E market.

For example, Commodore Independent Filmworks, LLC (CIF) hosted a one-time private pilot episode screening of “Mercy Rd.” at Greenbelt Cinema in Greenbelt, Maryland on January 27, 2024. Cast, crew and their family members, talent, legislative guests and entertainment executives from as far away as California attended.

“This pilot episode of “Mercy Rd.” was only filmed to be considered for network distribution. Once a selected network decides to “greenlight” the project, the entire series will be re-filmed to the network’s liking,” Anthony E. Commodore, a Charles County, Maryland resident and CEO of CIF said. “The filming of “Mercy Rd.” took place at a Baltimore, Maryland location 75 percent of the time and the remaining 25 percent was filmed in Alexandria, Virginia.”

Once the series is “greenlit,” Commodore intends to film it entirely in the state of Maryland and to employ Maryland-based businesses and talent. He noted that the sole purpose of having a private screening for this pilot episode is to give the cast and crew an opportunity to see the outcome of their hard work.



Photo courtesy of Commodore Independent Filmworks

Commodore runs the film production company that also has clients.

He explained that approximately 95 percent of actors and crew were Maryland-based for the filming of the pilot episode of “Mercy Rd.”

Julian Brittano, an actor and resident of Danville, Virginia, played Pastor Alan Grant. He reflected on what makes him proud to be a part of the cast of the faith-based drama series.

““Mercy Rd.” has a clear picture deriving from its creator, Anthony Commodore. Great cast of talented actors and crew. This is a story of encouragement when life seems to be hitting you with test after test,” Brittano said.

Brittano also reflected on what he would like potential viewers to take away from watching the series.

“I would like for the viewers to evolve the way they communicate and express themselves with the people they engage on a daily basis. Regardless of circumstances and situations, we must be aware that there’s always a better way to respond or react,” he said.

Around 2010, Commodore became interested in film after spending a few years in the acting circuit. CIF was founded in 2017. Recent film credits include Associate Producer on BET’s “So Fly Christmas (2023) and BET’s “One Night Stay (2023).” Other



(L to R): Anthony E. Commodore, Jordan Babbs (cast member, singer and daughter of singer Durrell “Tank” Babbs, Sr.); and “Tank” at the pilot episode screening for “Mercy Rd.”

Photo credit: India Hawkins of Kindred Images

series include “King Sun” (2017) and “UpRoar” Comedy Series (2019).

Commodore explained that people who want to know more about the series can keep updated on the progress and the status of the series via <http://cindependentfilmworks.net> and social media: <https://www.facebook.com/anthony.commodore> and <https://www.instagram.com/anthonycommodore>.

“To boost Maryland’s economy, I hope to continue to keep our project inside the state of Maryland and give opportunities to Maryland-based actors, crew members, community businesses and Maryland stakeholders,” said Commodore. “To its [“Mercy Rd.’s”] success, I am grateful for everyone who took part.”



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Nichelle Johnson Makes History as Maryland's First MBE Ombudsman

By Demetrius Dillard

Governor Wes Moore recently announced that Nichelle Johnson, an IT professional who has devoted 20 years of her career to advancing diversity and equity, will serve as the state's first Minority Business Enterprise ombudsman in the Governor's Office of Small, Minority, and Women Business Affairs.

As ombudsman, Johnson will essentially be among the pivotal problem solvers – or mediators – at the state government level. Her new role consists of a broad range of responsibilities, from rectifying contractual matters between prime contractors and minority business enterprises, to developing policies and guidance to assist agencies in implementing program compliance, to overseeing data collection of documented nonperformance by prime contractors.

When Johnson learned that Moore's office would be adding the ombudsman position, she was interested and filed an application. She believed in herself, and now she's been working in the new role for about three weeks now.

Johnson lauded Moore and Lieutenant Governor Aruna Miller for their efforts in striving to build an equitable, competitive state economy through initiatives, policies and legislation that prompts increased participation of minority-owned and women-owned small businesses.

"I'm very appreciative of Gov. Moore and his commitment to our small, minority and women-owned businesses," said Johnson, a Baltimore City native. "It was really important to him that this role be filled and also to our special secretaries."

Prior to being MBE ombudsman, Johnson was a compliance manager with the Governor's Office of Small,

Minority, and Women Business Affairs since 2019. According to a statement released by Moore's office, Johnson has a 20-year record of helping entrepreneurs start and expand their businesses in the private sector, providing technical support and IT services as a prime contractor and subcontractor.

"I am grateful that Nichelle has raised her hand to serve Maryland in this new leadership position. Our entire administration is confident in her ability to advocate for our minority-owned businesses and help us grow a more equitable economy," Moore said.

"As the first Minority Business Enterprise Ombudsman in Maryland history, Nichelle will work to forge stronger partnerships between our small businesses and state government. And in doing so, she will position us to win this decade."

As ombudsman, Johnson will also ensure that the Governor's Office of Small, Minority, and Women Business Affairs is represented and engaged in advising state personnel on program requirements and will participate in the state's Senior Procurement Advisory Group, Minority Business Enterprise Advisory Committee and Procurement Improvement Council.

A part of Johnson's job she is particularly excited about will be developing training programs for prime contractors and minority business enterprise subcontractors to help ensure final contract outcomes meet established MBE goals.

In fact, Johnson started her own company based in Baltimore, Johnson Technical Services LLC, and worked for a few years in that capacity.

She has always been an advocate of advancing the mission of offering resources to the region's small, minority and women business owners. Her abundant experience in



Nichelle Johnson (center) with colleagues Lisa Mitchell Sennaar (left) and Tanita Johnson (right) at the Maryland Women's Small Business Celebration in October 2023 at the Governor's Coordinating Offices in Crownsville, Maryland.
Photo credit: Governor's Office of Small, Minority & Women Business Affairs

business development, private sector engagement and IT services prepared her for her current role.

"I feel like all of it had a part that plays into what I do with our business owners now. I feel like it gave me a lot of the information," Johnson told The Baltimore Times.

"Me going through those processes myself, like getting business development help from organizations like Women Entrepreneurs of Baltimore and going through some of the other training, like at the SBDC (Small Business Development Center)... prepared me to be able to know the assistance and resources that companies have available."

A graduate of Lake Clifton High School in East Baltimore, Johnson began college at Morgan State University before transferring to the University of Maryland Global Campus where she graduated with a bachelor's degree in business administration. Johnson holds a graduate certificate in leadership and management.

As part of the Moore-Miller Administration's endeavor to close the racial wealth gap and expand opportunities for the state's minority business owners, Moore signed an executive order to promote data reporting and compliance on state agency performance in February 2023.

Increasing the state government's performance toward reaching its 29 percent Minority Business Enterprise program participation goal coincides with the above-mentioned goals.

Johnson, as a Black woman, is elated to join Gov. Moore and state leaders in providing opportunities that drive a more equitable business community in Maryland.

"I feel that not only in my role, but you can see it across the entire cabinet that the governor... definitely wants there to be diversity," Johnson said.

"I think that he does see the value in diversity, and that includes not only minorities but women. So, putting women and minorities in roles of leadership is an amazing way to show that."

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Ravens Must Turn the Page After Devastating Loss

By Tyler Hamilton

The 2023 season seemed like it was going to be a magical year for the Baltimore Ravens. They finished with the best record in the NFL and earned the right to host two AFC playoff games at M&T Bank Stadium.

The Ravens got to host four games, BUT the AFC Championship game is one the organization and its fans would want to forget. Patrick Mahomes and the Kansas City Chiefs came to Baltimore and proceeded to end the Ravens' season with a 17-10 win.

"It's fun winning," Ravens wide receiver Zay Flowers said. "When you get to the playoffs, you want to win, but sometimes the best team doesn't always win."

Ravens coach John Harbaugh has led the team to four AFC Championship game appearances. They've lost three of the games, most recently last Sunday (Jan. 28, 2024).

"I was proud of them. I'm proud of the season that they had. I feel like it was a team that had a lot of challenges. I don't think it was a team that was too highly touted coming into the season by the pundits and the prognosticators and all that, and

I think they proved a lot of people wrong, all year," Harbaugh said.

The 2023 Ravens came into the season with a lot to prove. Quarterback Lamar Jackson had plenty of doubters after signing a five-year, \$260 million contract during the offseason. Jackson's outstanding season answered the questions with a performance that landed him at the top of the MVP race.

The individual success was great, but Jackson wants more.

"I'm not frustrated at all. I'm angry about losing. We were a game away from the Super Bowl," Jackson said. "We've been waiting all this time, all these moments for an opportunity like this, and we fell short, but I feel like our team is going to build. This offseason, we're going to get right, get better, grind and try to be in this position again but on the other side of victory."

Next year's Ravens team will be different from the one that just lost on Sunday. That's the disappointing thing about how they came up short.

Veteran receiver Odell Beckham Jr. was one of the key contributors for Baltimore. His mentorship helped Flowers excel in his rookie season.

Beckham signed a one-year deal

with the Ravens. He's not sure if he'll be back.

"To me, if there is anything I felt about myself – regardless of anybody's opinion or anything like that – is that I know that I can still play football, and I know that I still have [stuff] in the tank," Beckham said. "It's just unfortunate – the way that it went today – because, to me, it's so much bigger than one person in this room; it was [about] just being able to have that moment with these guys you've worked so hard with. So, for me, as far as my future, [I'll] just take a step back, breathe for a second, pick [my] chin up, just know that life goes on, and we'll figure out what's next after that."

There's always next year, but the devastating loss still stings for Ravens fans.



John Harbaugh

Photo credit: Patrick Smith/Getty Images



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Available Subcontracting Opportunities

For upcoming contracting opportunities and bid questions, please contact:

Todd McQuinn, PE
Lead Cost Estimator

todd.mcquinn@cswfdtjv.com

Jake Buttz

Senior Estimator

jacob.buttz@cswfdtjv.com

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CITY OF BALTIMORE
DEPARTMENT OF GENERAL SERVICES
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 **GS16810RRR – Mitchell Courthouse Roof Replacement**, will be received at the Office of the Comptroller, Room 204, City Hall, Baltimore, Maryland until 11:00 A.M. on **WEDNESDAY, MARCH 06, 2024**. Board of Estimates employees will be stationed at the Security Unit Counter just inside the Holliday Street entrance to City Hall from 10:45 A.M. to 11:00 A.M. every Wednesday to receive Bids.

Positively no bids will be received after 11:00 A.M. The bids will be publicly opened by the Board of Estimates in Room 215, City Hall at Noon. Bid opening proceedings can be also viewed live at <https://www.charmtvbaltimore.com/live-stream> at 12:00 noon. Bid tabulation sheets detailing the bids received will be publicly posted to the Comptroller's website by COB on the date of bid opening.

The Contract Documents may be purchased for a non-refundable cost of **\$50.00** by contacting Azza Rizkallah at azza.rizkallah@baltimorecity.gov as of **FRIDAY, JANUARY 26, 2024**.

Conditions and requirements of the Bid are found in the bid package.

All contractors bidding on this Contract must first be pre-qualified by the City of Baltimore Boards and Commissions. Interested contractors should call 410 396-6883 or contact the Office of Boards and Commissions at 4 South Frederick Street, 4th Floor, Baltimore, MD 21202. **If a bid is submitted by a Joint Venture ("JV"), then in that event, the documents that establish the JV shall be submitted with the bid for verification purposes.** The Prequalification Category required for bidding on this project is **F07500 – ROOFING INDUSTRIAL**.

The Cost Qualification Range for this work shall be **\$2,000,000.01 to \$3,000,000.00**

A "Pre-Bidding information" session will be conducted at the site: **100 N. Calvert Street, Baltimore, MD 21202 on THURSDAY, February 08, 2024 at 10:00 a.m.**

Principal Items of work for this project are:

1. Roofing

The MBE goal is **21%**

The WBE goal is **8%**

CONTRACT NO. GS16810RRR

APPROVED:

M. Celeste Amato

Clerk,, Board of Estimates

APPROVED:

Berke Attila

Director, Department of
General Services

To place Legal Notices,
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email: legals@btimes.com

MSDE Opens Applications for Summer Meals Program Sites

BALTIMORE (January 31, 2024) – The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) is seeking public and private nonprofit organizations to serve as meal sites for the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). The SFSP, a U.S. Department of Agriculture summer program, provides free, nutritious meals for children and teens who might otherwise go hungry when school is not in session.

In 2023, SFSP organizations served almost four million meals at over 1,300 sites to youth up to age 18, and to individuals over 18 with special needs who attend a public or private non-profit school.

"Food insecurity during summer months is a concern for Maryland families who rely on school meals during the school year," said Dr. Carey Wright, Interim State Superintendent of Schools. "MSDE wants to build strong community relationships and partnerships across the state through a network of free summer meal sites. By expanding the network of sites, particularly in rural areas, families will have increased access to healthy and nutritious meals all year long."

The SFSP provides reimbursement to organizations that sponsor sites to serve nutritious meals to children in areas where at least 50 percent of households qualify for free or reduced-price meals under the National School Lunch Program, rural and migrant farm areas, or 50 percent of the children enrolled in a summer program qualify for free or reduced-price meals. Most organizations may be reimbursed for up to two meals or snacks per child per day. Camps and migrant programs may be reimbursed for up to three meals per child each day. All meals and snacks must meet federal nutrition standards.

The application deadline is Saturday, June 15, 2024. For more information, contact the Office of School and Community Nutrition Programs at 410-767-0199 or visit www.eatsmartmaryland.org.



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