



# THE BALTIMORE TIMES

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with Christina S. Sledge



## The Urgent Need for Children and Adults to Make Reading a Priority

*There are currently 45 million Americans who are functionally illiterate, unable to read above a 5th-grade level, and half of all adults can't read a book at an 8th-grade level, according to The Literacy Project, an independent nonprofit. Christina and Eddie Sledge, founders of Sledge House Media's latest project, "A Day at Shea" allows them to spread the love of baseball to children, promote literacy and encourage families to read together. The heartwarming story has been reimagined with Eddie's wife, Chris, as the main character.*

*(See article on page 8.) Courtesy photo*



## President Biden Takes Next Steps to Revised Student Loan Forgiveness Plans

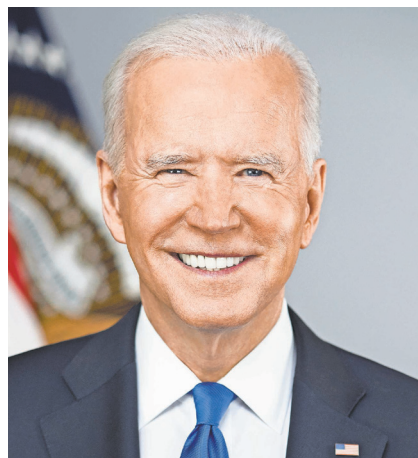
By Andrea Blackstone

When President Joe Biden recently visited Wisconsin, he announced a new student loan debt cancellation plan benefitting over 30 million American borrowers.

“First, my administration will propose a new rule to cancel up to \$20,000 in runaway interest for any borrower who owes more now than when they started paying the loan. And for low and middle-class families enrolled in my SAVE program, we’ll cancel all of your interest. And second, we plan to cancel student debt for borrowers who still owe student loans even though they started repaying them more than two decades ago,” President Biden said, citing five major intended actions.

He added that there is a plan to cancel debt for about two million borrowers who would be eligible for debt forgiveness through the SAVE Program, Public Loan Service Forgiveness, or other debt cancelling programs, but who are not enrolled in these programs. Additionally, there is a plan to cancel debt for borrowers who the Department of Education determines were “cheated” by universities that left students with unaffordable loans but delivered little benefit.

“And finally, the Department of Education will propose a new rule that will cancel student loan debt for Americans facing financial hardships. And over the coming months, the Department of Education will propose and then implement these plans,” President Biden said. “Starting this fall, we plan to deliver up to \$20,000 in interest relief to over 20 million



**President Joe Biden**  
Photo credit: whitehouse.gov

borrowers and full forgiveness for millions more.

Jon Donenberg, Deputy Director at National Economic Council at The White House coordinates economic policy matters across the administration, including student loans. He told The Baltimore Times that President Biden’s new plan dates to his original plan to relieve student loan debt and the U.S. Supreme Court’s evaluation of it.

The high court bluntly rejected a plan that would have discharged up to \$20,000 in student loans for low-income Pell Grant recipients and \$10,000 of relief to remaining federal student loan borrowers.

“My Administration’s student debt relief plan would have been the lifeline tens of millions of hard-working Americans needed as they try to recover from a once-in-a-century pandemic. Nearly 90 percent of the relief from our plan would have gone to borrowers making less than \$75,000 a year, and none of it would have gone



**Jon Donenberg,**  
Deputy Director at National Economic Council at The White House  
Photo credit: White House Photo Office

to people making more than \$125,000. It would have been life-changing for millions of Americans and their families. And it would have been good for economic growth, both in the short- and long-term,” President Biden also said in 2023.

“The Department of Education is pursuing alternative paths to debt relief under the Higher Education Act (HEA),” Donenberg explained.

The original HEA <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/20/1082>, created in 1965, established federal aid programs to provide financial assistance for students to help students pay for college. It contains a provision allowing the Secretary of Education to “compromise, waive, or release any right, title, claim, lien, or demand, however acquired, including any equity or any right of redemption.”

Donenberg further stated debt loan debt relief has already been provided to four million Americans during

Biden’s administration.

“We’re going to continue on our pre-existing efforts, but these new rules are going to help us reach over 30 million Americans. Our plan is to release those rules over the coming months and to work to implement them as quickly as possible,” he said.

Borrowers who are not yet enrolled in the SAVE Plan are also encouraged to consider applying for it. Donenberg stated enrolled borrowers only pay 5% of their monthly disposable income after required expenses are taken out.

“If you stay in the program for a period of time, eventually your remaining loan balance will be wiped out at the end. There’s a similar program for public service workers in particular, our teachers, our firefighters. Folks that serve the community,” Donenberg explained.

He added, “We know there are 43 million Americans in this country who have student debt right now. And we know that many of those individuals could be eligible for relief under the law, but either the Department has to finish writing those regulations, or we need to make sure we can keep people enrolled in the programs that exist.”

During an April 9, 2024 White House Briefing on Student Debt Relief, it was mentioned that if finalized as proposed, student debt relief would be canceled for borrowers who first entered repayment 20 or more years ago. The aim is that much loan forgiveness would be done automatically, not requiring an application.

Learn more about student loan debt relief proposals and programs by visiting [www.StudentAid.gov/debtrelief](http://www.StudentAid.gov/debtrelief).

# Get Beach Body Ready: Discover the Benefits of Regular Exercise

By Jayne Hopson

Regular exercise is the center of good health, well-being, and achieving a healthy, eye-pleasing physique that many desire, especially when aiming for a “beach-ready” body. The importance of physical activity extends beyond superficial appearances, deeply influencing one’s mental health, physical health, and overall quality of life.

At the core of its benefits, regular exercise significantly enhances physical health in numerous ways. It helps in the management of body weight by burning calories and improving metabolism, which is crucial for achieving and maintaining a beach-ready body. Engaging in physical activities strengthens the heart, enabling it to pump more efficiently with less strain, and lowers blood pressure.

Exercise also increases good cholesterol levels (HDL), while decreasing unhealthy triglycerides. This one-two punch keeps your blood flowing smoothly, reducing your risk of cardiovascular diseases. From a musculoskeletal perspective, exercise strengthens bones, muscles, and joints, thus reducing the risk of osteoporosis and enhancing physical stability and mobility.

Regular exercise is the foundation of not just for looking attractive but for long-term health and functionality.

Beyond physical health, regular exercise plays a significant role in enhancing mental health and well-being. It acts as a powerful stress



**Jayne Hopson**  
*Courtesy Photo*

reliever, providing a natural and effective antidote to mental strain and depression.

Studies show physical activity stimulates various brain chemicals that may leave you feeling happier, more relaxed, and less anxious. Additionally, regular exercise can improve sleep quality,

which is crucial for stress recovery, cognitive function, and overall well-being. It boosts overall mood and when done consistently, can contribute to an increased sense of self-esteem and confidence, partly due to physical improvements and the sense of achievement from meeting exercise goals.

Summer is right around the corner, so, there is still time to achieve a beach-ready body through regular exercise, which also teaches discipline, patience, and resilience. Setting and working towards fitness goals requires a level of commitment that goes beyond the physical activity and streams into other areas of life, promoting a healthier lifestyle overall. The benefits of discipline are many, including improved eating habits, better time management, and a more structured routine, all contributing to better health and well-being.

Moreover, the social aspect of exercise can’t be overlooked. Many find motivation and support through group workouts, fitness classes, or sports clubs, fostering a sense of community and belonging. This social engagement is crucial for mental well-being, offering an outlet for stress through social interaction and mutual support

in fitness journeys.

It is good to know that getting a beach-ready body is not solely about losing weight or gaining muscle mass; it’s about nurturing a body that is strong, healthy, and ready to deal with life’s stresses. Adopting a lifestyle that values physical activity as a pillar of health and well-being. This approach ensures that the pursuit of a beach-ready physique is balanced, sustainable, and enriches one’s life rather than focusing narrowly on aesthetic goals.

When working on your beach-ready body, it is important to approach exercise with a balanced and healthy mindset. Obsessing about building a perfect physique can lead to negative body image and unhealthy behaviors. Remember, beach bodies come in various shapes and sizes, and what’s most important is feeling strong, confident, and healthy in one’s skin.

To maximize the benefits of exercise, fitness trainers recommend a mix of cardiovascular exercises, strength training, and flexibility workouts. Cardio exercises, like swimming, running, or cycling, are effective for burning calories and improving heart health. Strength training, such as weightlifting or bodyweight exercises, builds muscle and enhances metabolic rate, which is essential for a toned appearance.

Don’t skip the flexibility exercises, including yoga or stretching routines, improve joint mobility and prevent injuries. Combining these types of exercises ensures a well-rounded fitness regimen that promotes overall health and aids in achieving a toned and healthy body.

The benefits of regular exercise extend far beyond the superficial goal



*Photo credit: Shutterstock*

of achieving a beach-ready body. It plays a significant role in ensuring our physical health, mental well-being, and overall quality of life.

Regular physical activity is a key component of a healthy lifestyle, leading to a stronger, happier, and more resilient self. By adopting a balanced and sustainable approach to exercise, you can enjoy the experience of achieving better health and an improved quality of life, all while working towards a perfect physique.

## Identity Management Part 1: Keeping Your Identity Secure in an Ever-Connected World

By **Karen Clay**  
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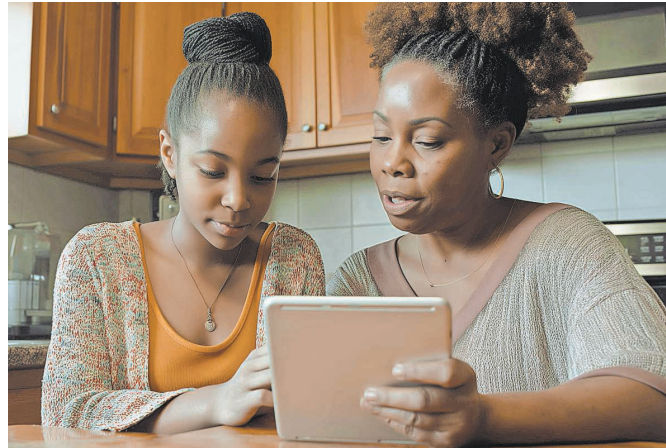
Today we live in an increasingly digital world. Gone are the days of console televisions and LP record players. Even CDs and DVDs are basically things of the past. As indicated by 2022 Census Bureau data, 40.19% of the US population is comprised of the Baby Boomer

(born 1946-1964) and Gen X (born 1965-1980) generations while 42.55% are of the Millennial (born 1981-1996) and Gen Z (born 1997-2012) generations. This means that we have almost equal portions of people who remember the analog age as those who only know the digital age. This almost balanced division delineates a society at the crossroads of memory and modernity, where those who grew up amidst the hum of analog technology coexist with digital natives for whom the internet, social media, and cloud-based living are second nature.

The pervasive presence of smartphones, cloud computing, and AI assistants that manage everything from our schedules to our home security systems represents a seismic shift in how we interact with technology. This has not only transformed our daily routines but also the very fabric of our social interactions, commerce, and personal privacy. As we navigate this digital landscape, the importance of managing our digital identity has become as crucial as safeguarding our physical possessions. For the Baby Boomer



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



**Teaching Mom Technology**  
*Photo credit: Midjourney generated graphic*

and Generation X demographics, this transition poses unique challenges and opportunities, prompting a reevaluation of concepts such as digital literacy, online privacy, social media engagement, and legacy planning.

Navigating this diverse digital terrain demands an understanding of both the technological past that shaped one era and the digital innovations defining another. For Baby Boomers, who may have had limited exposure to technology during their formative years, acquiring digital literacy skills can seem daunting, however, they can become proficient in various digital tools and platforms with the proper guidance and resources.

Digital literacy is far more than just the ability to use social media or send emails; it's a comprehensive understanding of how to effectively and safely navigate, evaluate, and create information using a range of digital technologies. For the Baby Boomer generation, enhancing digital literacy is crucial not only for staying connected with family and friends but also for accessing essential services, from online

banking to telehealth. Improving digital literacy can start with mastering the basics of internet use, including understanding cybersecurity practices to protect personal information online. Additionally, taking courses specifically designed for older adults can demystify technology, covering everything from using smart devices and apps to understanding social media privacy settings. Libraries, community centers, and online platforms like Coursera, Get Setup, or Senior Planet offer tailored programs that can empower Baby Boomers to become confident digital citizens. Engaging in these learning opportunities not only boosts digital skills but also contributes to bridging the digital divide, ensuring that everyone, regardless of age, can benefit from the digital world.

Along with digital literacy skills, knowledge of how to protect one's online identity is also a key skill to learn. Online privacy concerns have escalated with the advent of sophisticated tracking technologies and data breaches. For individuals in

their middle to later years, protecting sensitive information online is not just about avoiding scams; it's about understanding how their data is collected, used, and shared by websites and apps. Implementing strong passwords, understanding privacy settings, and being cautious with the information shared on social media are foundational steps. Moreover, using privacy-focused tools such as VPNs and encrypted communication services can add an additional layer of security, ensuring that personal information remains confidential.

This is especially important when using social media platforms to stay engaged with friends and family as they offer unprecedented opportunities for connection and engagement. For Baby Boomers and Gen X, navigating these platforms wisely is key to maintaining a positive online presence. This includes understanding the implications of sharing personal information, recognizing the public nature of online interactions, and utilizing privacy settings to control who can see and interact with their content. Encouraging thoughtful and responsible social media use not only protects personal information but also fosters meaningful connections online.

For this generation, the path to digital literacy and social media engagement is not merely about keeping up with new digital developments; it's fundamentally about grasping the ways in which these digital platforms and tools can enrich their lives, help maintain relationships, and ensure they remain an active part of today's digital-centric society. Enhancing their digital literacy skills, and engaging thoughtfully with social media, are the first steps toward securing their online identities.

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## It's Tax Time!

# IRS Kicks Off Annual Dirty Dozen with Warning About Phishing, Smishing Scams

WASHINGTON — The Internal Revenue Service kicked off the annual Dirty Dozen list recently with a warning for taxpayers to be aware of evolving phishing and smishing scams designed to steal sensitive taxpayer information.

With taxpayers continuing to be bombarded by email and text scams, the IRS and the Security Summit partners warned individuals and businesses to remain vigilant against these attacks. Fraudsters and identity thieves attempt to trick the recipient into clicking a suspicious link, filling out personal and financial information or downloading a malware file onto their computer.

"Scammers are relentless in their attempts to obtain sensitive financial and personal information, and impersonating the IRS remains a favorite tactic," said IRS Commissioner Danny Werfel. "People can be anxious to get the latest information about their refund or other tax issues, so scammers frequently try using the IRS as a way to trick people. The IRS urges people to be extra cautious about unsolicited messages and avoid clicking any links in an unsolicited email or text if they are uncertain."

As a member of the Security Summit, the IRS has worked with state tax agencies and the nation's tax industry for nine years to cooperatively implement a variety of internal security measures to protect taxpayers. The collaborative effort by the Summit partners also has focused on educating taxpayers about scams and fraudulent schemes throughout the year, which can lead to tax-related identity theft. Through initiatives like the Dirty Dozen and the Security Summit program, the IRS strives to



protect taxpayers, businesses and the tax system from cyber criminals and deceptive activities that seek to extract information and money.

#### Phish or smish: Don't take the bait

The IRS continues to see a barrage of email and text scams targeting taxpayers and others. These schemes frequently peak during tax season but they continue throughout the year. Taxpayers face a wide variety of these scams and schemes. Tax professionals, payroll providers and human resource departments remain favorite targets of email and text scams since they have sensitive personal and financial information. One common example remains the "new client" scam that can target tax pros and others.

That means taxpayers and tax professionals should be alert to fake communications posing as legitimate organizations in the tax and financial community, including the IRS and state tax agencies. These messages arrive in the form of unsolicited texts or emails to lure unsuspecting victims to provide valuable personal and

financial information that can lead to identity theft. There are two main types:

- **Phishing:** An email sent by fraudsters claiming to come from the IRS. The email lures the victims into the scam with a variety of ruses such as enticing victims with a phony tax refund or threatening them with false legal or criminal charges for tax fraud.
- **Smishing:** A text or smartphone SMS message where scammers often use alarming language such as, "Your account has now been put on hold," or "Unusual Activity Report," with a bogus "Solutions" link to restore the recipient's account. Unexpected tax refunds are another potential lure for scam artists.

Never click on any unsolicited communication claiming to be the IRS as it may surreptitiously load malware. It may also be a way for malicious hackers to load ransomware that keeps the legitimate user from accessing their system and files.

In some cases, phishing emails may appear to come from a legitimate

See **WARNING**, page 10

# Nonprofit Removes Systematic Barriers, Serves Single Mothers, Children in Baltimore

By Andrea Blackstone

According to the United States Census Bureau, there were an estimated 10.9 million one-parent family groups with a child under the age of 18 in 2022.

“Data from the annual release of America’s Families and Living Arrangements also show that 80% of one-parent family groups were maintained by a mother,” per information provided by an annual release.

Given the large number of single mothers, the ability to access more resources that foster financial and career growth could benefit legions of female-headed households.

Brittney Strickland, a Baltimore, Maryland resident, is an example of how much a driven single mother can accomplish with support, structure and removal of common barriers.

She discovered a resource called the Jeremiah Program (JP) after picking up a flyer at the public library while homeschooling her children in the fall of 2022.

“I’ve benefited from the program in many ways that have positively impacted my life,” said Strickland. “I took care of my children and JP came along and took care of me and gave me a huge helping hand which in turn gives my family access to a better-quality life.”

The national organization uplifts single mothers and their children experiencing poverty in Baltimore and in nine U.S. cities.

A 12-week coaching opportunity helped Strickland to believe that going back to school as a single mom was not a far-fetched idea.

“Becoming a single mom really takes a toll on your confidence and identity. Those 12 weeks really helped me to



*Chastity Lord, president and CEO of Jeremiah Program*  
Photo credit: Satsum Photography

rediscover myself as we talked about shame and struggle to focus on our strengths and dreams as well as the goal plan to achieve the dreams,” the mother of three said. “I graduate from Morgan State University this May.”

Strickland, who had to prioritize taking care of an autistic child, said that she received an Early Childhood Education grant with the assistance of the Jeremiah Program. The grant paid for her college tuition, upon returning to college. Other resources that she received included a laptop; childcare funds to pay sitters as needed; tutoring services for one of her children; coaching and other services.

Strickland’s entrepreneurial interests have also been supported through the Jeremiah Program. She mentioned that she attended the Jeremiah Program Summit this past March. After participating in a Spark Tank competition, she won third place. The pitch competition is designed to elevate JP moms and alumni by driving funding to their existing business ventures or new business ideas. Strickland was shocked and received a prize of \$2,500. Her business, Celebrating Milestones, is in the



*(L-R:) Brittney Strickland, a current Jeremiah Program (JP) mom from Baltimore, Maryland won third place for her business, Celebrating Milestones, during a Spark Tank competition. Juanita Breedlove, a JP alum from Austin, Texas won second place for BUKidz. Bianca Scott, a JP alum from Minneapolis, Minnesota was a first-place winner for ESPI Properties LLC. Lorrienne Williams, a current JP mom from Brooklyn placed fourth for her business, Liz and Marc Enterprises.*

Photo credit: Ritchie King Jr.

concept stage along with the prototype of the products.

“Celebrating Milestones aims to support families of those with developmental delays by providing educational tools, a curriculum that appeals to the neurodivergent brain and other resources to help reduce achievement and opportunity gaps,” said Strickland.

Chastity Lord, president and CEO of Jeremiah Program, further explained how the organization works to level the playing field for single mothers and their small children.

“We feel that everybody wins when moms win. And, specifically to level the playing field is to really invest in the person who ... has the most impact on a child’s life,” Lord said. “A ‘JP mom’ is with us for four to six years, so it’s a long-term relationship. In addition to that, we have a really robust alumni program where we bring alumni back every year to be in community with each other.”

Lord stated that every “JP mom” has a goal of earning a college degree and has at least one child under the age of seven. She stated one of the reasons the organization works with mothers who

are raising small children is because they oftentimes do not have a stable social safety net.

“When you think about childcare, when you think about after-school care and you think about the immediate need for an adult to be present... and so it allows us to really curate resources and supplemental services around that particular hardest time in a child’s life,” said Lord.

Many of JP’s mothers were once in college. Due to pregnancy, they stopped but wanted to return. JP works with participating mothers from career navigation and goal setting to applying to college. Participants must be interested in pursuing a college degree. Providing service to Baltimoreans began a year ago.

“Opportunity is not everywhere and I’m so grateful to be a part of this program that really helped to redirect my life,” said Strickland, reflecting on the hand-up provided by JP.

Single mothers can learn more about the Jeremiah Program via <https://jeremiahprogram.org/for-moms/become-a-jp-mom/> and register through the link. A new cohort will reportedly start in June.

# Improve Health Outcomes: Better Health, Better You Through Prevention, Self-care

By **Andrea Blackstone**

Dr. Katina Kennedy agrees that good health begins with a patient.

“It is imperative that the patient know their health status. Patients can do this by partaking in regular health screenings and living a quality life by adhering to a healthy lifestyle; even those who suffer from chronic conditions,” said Dr. Kennedy, owner of Dr. Katina Health and Wellness, Inc.

The dual-certified family and psychiatric nurse practitioner noted that Black people are more likely to die from heart disease. Major risk factors are smoking, hypertension, obesity and diabetes. These conditions increase the chance of heart disease which leads to a heart attack.

“In 2019, African Americans were 30 percent more likely to die from heart disease than non-Hispanic whites,” according to the Office of Minority Health.

Dr. Kennedy founded Florida-based All About Healthy Living Foundation, Inc. in 2016 to educate and inspire people on healthy living, especially in the African American community. She said that preventative care is an undervalued health lifestyle component that should be more commonly used by patients.

“Most patients, especially Black, Hispanic, [and] Caribbeans, only go to the healthcare provider when they are sick. They do not partake in preventative care. They do not go for their yearly physical exam, pap smear, prostate test, mammogram,

blood work and colonoscopy just to name a few,” according to the health expert.

She added, “I tell my patients all the time ‘if we can catch the issue before it worsens, you may save your life. Preventative care is key!’”

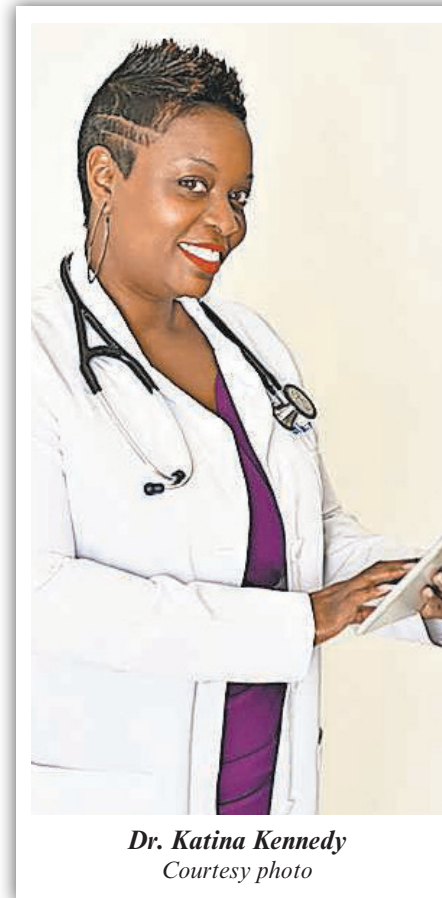
A yearly physical exam, eye exam, dental cleaning, well woman visits, prostate screening, mammogram, colonoscopy or Cologuard for colon cancer (ages 45 and older), bone density test to check for osteoporosis, and stress test or cardiac evaluation for ages 50 and over are key screenings for adults.

Various reasons that Black people may experience poor health include cultural eating. Consuming the wrong food and indulging in an unhealthy diet remains problematic. Genetics and lifestyle habits can put Black people at risk for chronic health conditions. Lack of exercise leads to obesity. Lack of sleep can also be problematic, according to Dr. Kennedy.

Health conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, stroke, obesity, asthma and heart are prevalent in white counterparts. However, Black people die more often from these conditions.

“Black people sometimes don’t like to take their medications and are not open to changing their lifestyle, such as eating healthier, exercise and getting adequate sleep,” said Dr. Kennedy.

Medical discrimination can factor into healthcare that may include misdiagnosis if the patient is obese. For example, Dr. Kennedy has encountered patients with



**Dr. Katina Kennedy**  
*Courtesy photo*

long-standing joint pain who were told by other providers that their complaints were because of obesity. Dr. Kennedy ultimately diagnosed them with conditions such as lupus and rheumatoid arthritis. She advised that patients should find a healthcare provider who cares, listens and understands them.

National Minority Health Month is an ideal time to remain mindful of healthy behaviors that improve Black health and take action to end inequities and health disparities.

Dr. Kennedy is known for her

“Knowing Your Health Status” social media campaign.

“It is important to know the BIG 3—BCB—Blood Pressure, Cholesterol, Blood Sugar. Knowing what’s going on inside of the body can prompt one to make lifestyle changes which can contribute to better health,” she said.

Dr. Kennedy also suggested adhering to a healthier diet that includes fruits, vegetables, lean meats/protein, low processed foods and low sugar. Avoid the “bad” carbs—white bread, rice, pasta and get at least seven hours of sleep.

She added, “Stop skipping meals. You must fuel the body. Stop going all day without eating. Go for a walk 30 minutes at least three times a week. Drink half your body weight in ounces of water a day. Avoid alcohol. Partake in a self-care day to de-stress, take medications if applicable as prescribed, and go for health screenings.”

It is critical to note mental health is just as important as physical health, although it is often neglected, according to Dr. Kennedy.

“In order to be able to be your best self, you must make sure your mental state is taken care of and is managed,” she said. “In order to carry out your purpose and passion in life, you must take care of you first!”

Visit [www.drkatinakennedy.com](http://www.drkatinakennedy.com), to learn more about Dr. Kennedy and [www.drkatinakennedy.com/foundation](http://www.drkatinakennedy.com/foundation) to read additional details about All About Healthy Living Foundation Inc. Find Dr. Kennedy’s YouTube channel via <https://www.youtube.com/@DrKatina>.

## The Urgent Need for Children and Adults to Make Reading a Priority

By **Andrea Books**

Reading contributes to childhood development and lifelong success, but America's reading report card is making a failing grade.

"There are currently 45 million Americans who are functionally illiterate, unable to read above a 5th-grade level, and half of all adults can't read a book at an 8th-grade level," according to The Literacy Project, an independent nonprofit.

NAEP, National Assessment of Educational Progress, a congressionally mandated project administered by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported additional data.

"(NCES) administered the NAEP long-term trend (LTT) reading and mathematics assessments to 13-year-old students from October to December of the 2022–23 school year. The average scores for 13-year-olds declined 4 points in reading and 9 points in mathematics compared to the previous assessment administered during the 2019–20 school year."

### Taking Proactive Measures

Providing incentives for young children to read is one way to encourage children to read more at home. For example, each April, Pizza Hut begins enrollment for the following school year to encourage reading in schools nationwide. Parents can enroll them in the free reading incentive program called BOOK IT! that targets PreK–6th grade classrooms, parents and homeschool families.

"Students may redeem one Reading Award Certificate per month, and the certificate must be used to reward the

student who earned it. The student must be present. When a child redeems their Reading Award Certificate with Pizza Hut, they are celebrated with a one-topping Personal Pan Pizza," according to [www.bookitprogram.com](http://www.bookitprogram.com).

Sledge House Media, an award-winning multi-platform media company created the Home Run Reader program to enable children to earn free tickets to a 2024 Brooklyn Cyclones Game by reading books and submitting brief details about each one.

"Reading allows children to explore new places with their imaginations, learn new things and grow their language abilities which are essential lifelong skills," said Christina and Eddie Sledge, founders of Sledge House Media.

Christina and Eddie published "A Day at Shea" through their company in early 2024. The top new release and best seller on Amazon.com is intended for children ages 4 – 11. Their reimagined story features a baseball loving little girl who is from Brooklyn, New York. Chris dreams of seeing her favorite team play in Queens. When no one can take her to the game, she figures out a way to get her wish.

Reading can encourage personal and academic development, even in adults. Eddie explained that he gained his love of reading when he was a university student learning about African American history while witnessing Nikki Giovanni recite poetry when he was a soldier serving in the U.S. Army.

"It inspired me to obtain my bachelor's degree and then later my master's degree," said Eddie.

The lifelong avid baseball fan mentioned that his love of baseball was ignited at a very young age and remains

a big part of his life.

"I remember I went to Toronto, Ontario [Canada] in August of 2017 for the first time to see the Blue Jays play against the New York Yankees. I was awestruck. I couldn't decide which team to root for. It was my childhood dream come true," said Eddie.

Eddie had an opportunity to use a free ticket from the back of a Kellogg's Frosted Flakes Cereal box to see Darryl Strawberry and Dwight Gooden play at Shea Stadium when he was nine years old. "A Day at Shea" is based on his true story.

### Getting Back to Basics

Another method to influence children to develop life-long reading habits is by taking trips to the library with them.

Christina recalls that she gained a love of reading by visiting Brower Park Library in Crown Heights Brooklyn as a child.

"It was mesmerizing to open a book, look at the pictures and hear the stories. I felt like I was transported into the story I remember my mother reading to me at an early age. I was so excited to learn to read on my own."

Children from different backgrounds



*Christina and Eddie Sledge, Marylanders and founders of Sledge House Media®. "A Day at Shea" is the husband and wife's latest children's book. Courtesy photo*

and ethnicities benefit from feeling represented in books.

"I wanted to pay homage to my husband, Eddie, and encourage girls who love baseball. It is very important to tell stories of children of color in the sport of baseball. Representation is important for girls and boys of color to see their experiences and themselves in books and in the sport of baseball," said Christina.

She added, "A Day at Shea" reminds us to dream big! The simple act of going to a baseball game can positively impact a child's life."

Visit <https://www.sledgehousemedia.com/> to learn more about "A Day at Shea" and Sledge House Media.



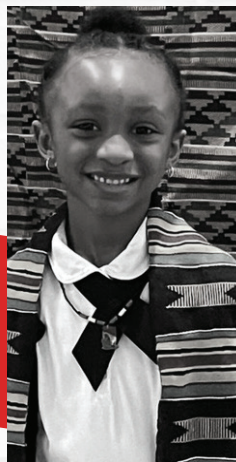
# ULMII NATIONAL TALENT COMPETITION

# UPLIFTING MINDS II

## ENTERTAINMENT CONFERENCE



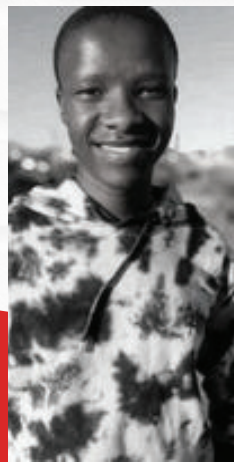
SOLEAH T. RAYNE  
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BAHAYIA GREEN  
BALTIMORE



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N. LONDON, S. AFRICA



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SAT. APRIL 20, 2024

VIA ZOOM! ACCESS AT  
[WWW.UPLIFTINGMINDS2.COM](http://WWW.UPLIFTINGMINDS2.COM)



1-3PM EST/  
10-12NOON PST

# Warning

Continued from page 5

sender or organization that has had their email account credentials stolen. Setting up two-factor or multi-factor authentication with their email provider can reduce the risk of individuals having their email account compromised.

Posing as a trusted organization, friend or family member remains a common way to target individuals and tax preparers for various scams. Individuals should verify the identity of the sender by using another communication method, for instance, calling a number they independently know to be accurate, not the number provided in the email or text.

The IRS initiates most contacts through regular mail and will never initiate contact with taxpayers by email, text or social media regarding a bill or tax refund.

## What to do

Individuals should never respond to tax-related phishing or smishing or click on the URL link. Instead, report all unsolicited emails - including the full email headers - claiming to be from the IRS or an IRS-related function to [phishing@irs.gov](mailto:phishing@irs.gov). If someone experienced any monetary losses due to an IRS-related scam incident, they should report it to the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA), the Federal Trade Commission and the Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3).

If a taxpayer receives an **email** claiming to be from the IRS that contains a request for personal information, taxes associated with a large investment, inheritance or lottery.

- Don't reply.
- Don't open any attachments. They can contain malicious code that may infect the computer or mobile phone.
- Don't click on any links. If a taxpayer inadvertently clicked on links in a suspicious email or website and entered confidential information, visit

the IRS' identity protection page.

- Send the full email headers or forward the email as-is to [phishing@irs.gov](mailto:phishing@irs.gov). Don't forward screenshots or scanned images of emails because this removes valuable information.
- Delete the original email.

If a taxpayer receives a **text** claiming to be from the IRS that contains a request for personal information, taxes associated with a large investment, inheritance or lottery.

- Don't reply.
- Don't open any attachments. They can contain malicious code that may infect the computer or mobile phone.
- Don't click on any links. If a taxpayer clicked on links in a suspicious SMS and entered confidential information, they should visit Identity Theft Central.
- Report the message to 7726(SPAM).
- Include both the Caller ID and the message body in an email and send to [phishing@irs.gov](mailto:phishing@irs.gov). Copy the

Caller ID from the message by pressing and holding on the body of the text message, then select Copy, paste into the email. If the taxpayer is unable to copy the Caller ID or message body, forward a screenshot of the message.

- Delete the original text.
- For more information see the IRS video on fake IRS-related text messages.

The Report Phishing and Online Scams page at [IRS.gov](https://www.irs.gov) provides complete details. The Federal Communications Commission's Smartphone Security Checker is a useful tool against mobile security threats.

## Report fraud

As part of the Dirty Dozen awareness effort regarding tax schemes and unscrupulous tax return preparers, the IRS urges individuals to report those who promote abusive tax practices and tax preparers who intentionally file incorrect returns.

To report a tax scheme or a dishonest tax return preparer individuals should send a completed Form 14242, Report Suspected Abusive Tax Promotions or Preparers, (along with any supporting materials) via mail or fax to the IRS Lead Development Center in the Office of Promoter Investigations.

Mail:  
Internal Revenue Service Lead  
Development Center  
Stop MS5040  
24000 Avila Road  
Laguna Niguel, California 92677 3405

Fax: 877-477-9135

Taxpayers and tax professionals can also submit this information to the IRS Whistleblower Office, where they may be eligible for a reward. For details, refer to the sections on Abusive Tax Schemes and Abusive Tax Return Preparers.



# Ravens Mock Draft Round-Up

By Tyler Hamilton

The 2024 NFL Draft is only a couple of weeks away and the options for the Baltimore Ravens are everywhere. Last year ended in heartbreaking fashion with the Kansas City Chiefs ending the Super Bowl dreams for Lamar Jackson and company. This year the Ravens added future Hall of Fame running back Derrick Henry to help out. They'll have more roster building to do as they get closer to training camp.

The Ravens have the 30th overall pick and plenty of needs to fill. Finding a wide receiver to play with Zay Flowers is high on the list. Getting help along the offensive line is another, especially after trading Morgan Moses away. As always, defense reigns supreme for the Ravens. Maybe they will get new defensive coordinator Zach Orr, a new player to feature?

Here's a round-up of the mock drafts for the Ravens first round:

**Charles Davis, NFL.com**

**Ennis Rakestraw Jr., Missouri**

The Ravens did a magnificent job of mixing and matching in the secondary during the 2023 season. Rakestraw's build is slight, but he makes plenty of plays on the ball and is extremely aggressive against the run. In short, he plays like a Raven!

**Ryan Mink, Ravens.com**

**OT Amarius Mims, Georgia**

It seems players fall to the Ravens every year and it happens again. Mims' lack of college experience (just eight starts in three years) could scare off some teams, but Ravens Offensive Coordinator Todd Monken is well aware of his talent from coaching him



**Amarius Mims**

Photo credit: Brandon Sloter/Getty Images

in college. Mims is massive and could step in at right tackle immediately before potentially moving to left tackle down the road.

**Mel Kiper Jr., ESPN**

**Amarius Mims, OT, Georgia**

The Ravens' trade of Morgan Moses piqued my interest. Do they believe 2022 fourth-rounder Daniel Faalele is ready to step into the starting job at right tackle, or are they planning to draft a tackle? And could the answer be yes to both? I'm leaning toward the

latter outcome. Faalele hasn't shown enough to be the entrenched starter, and maybe general manager Eric DeCosta is thinking about the future along the offensive line. This is the draft to do that.

Mims is the perfect case of a high-ceiling, high-risk prospect. The risk comes in that he has started only eight college games because of injuries and draft picks in front of him. The ceiling comes in when you watch him beat up on defenders and the way he can move his feet at 340 pounds. He didn't allow

a single sack at Georgia. Offensive line coaches will want to try to mold him because of his elite tools.

**Chad Rueter, NFL.com**

**OT Tyler Guyton, Oklahoma**

Baltimore's patience in past drafts has resulted in it finding excellent value late in each round. Guyton would be a perfect Ravens pick in that way, and he meets a need after the Morgan Moses trade and the inconsistent availability of veteran Ronnie Stanley.



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Thanks to the support of our players, the Maryland Lottery contributed more than \$714.3 million to support Maryland's schools, public health and safety programs and the environment, and paid more than \$1.73 billion in prizes to players during Fiscal Year 2023. Not bad. We'd like to think we generated a few million smiles as well.



Please play responsibly. For help, visit [mdgamblinghelp.org](http://mdgamblinghelp.org) or call 1-800-GAMBLER. Must be 18 years or older to play.

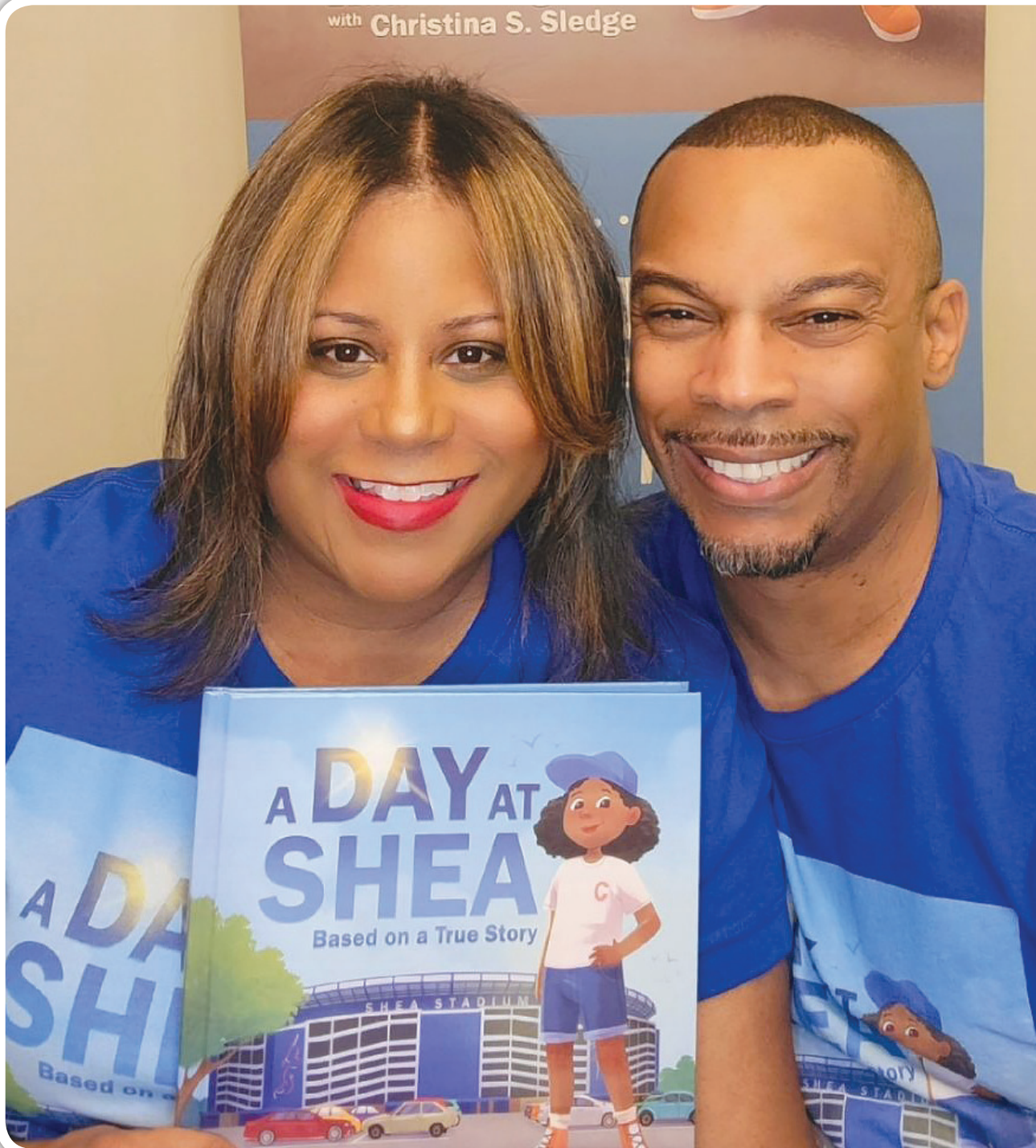
# The Annapolis Times

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with Christina S. Sledge



## The Urgent Need for Children and Adults to Make Reading a Priority

*There are currently 45 million Americans who are functionally illiterate, unable to read above a 5th-grade level, and half of all adults can't read a book at an 8th-grade level, according to The Literacy Project, an independent nonprofit. Christina and Eddie Sledge, founders of Sledge House Media's latest project, "A Day at Shea" allows them to spread the love of baseball to children, promote literacy and encourage families to read together. The heartwarming story has been reimagined with Eddie's wife, Chris, as the main character.*

*(See article on page 8.) Courtesy photo*

