

Three Baltimore women find enrichment in business



(Left to right) Ronae Brock, Tehma H. Smith, and Michelle Davenport-Johnson were concerned by the potentially harmful ingredients in the skin care products they were using. They decided to develop a product line of their own and started Earth's Enrichments, a local organic body and skin care company that prides itself in being health conscious and environmentally friendly. (See article on page 13)

Courtesy Photo

Local accessory designer launches jewelry collection to benefit NKF-MD

Lutherville, Md.— “New Vintage by SAM,” a lifestyle apparel and accessory brand dedicated to making a positive change in the world through artistic and fashion expression, has “stepped into the ring” with a powerful combination of style and philanthropy.

The Baltimore-based company just launched its Knock Out Kidney Disease (KOKD) collection of bracelets with “purpose-filled” trinkets to benefit the National Kidney Foundation of Maryland (NKF-MD).

This collection mixes the Foundation’s signature orange color with metallic and crystal elements, including Jasper, Agate and Onyx (black, brown and cream), “to help shine light on kidney health awareness.”

Each special trinket possesses its own unique design – staying true to the New Vintage by Sam culture of individuality, while each complementary combination of beads and charms has its own meaning and healing properties consistent with the theme of holistic well being.

A total of seven designs are available in three different bead sizes: itty bitty (6mm) for \$20, midi bitty (8mm) for \$30, and standard size (10mm) for \$40. All products within the KOKD collection are packaged with a limited edition velvet dust bag, composition card and a special thank you from the line’s creator, Sam Smith.

A Reisterstown, resident Smith aims “to utilize her creativity to leave a lasting impression on her community and individuals alike.”

Introduced to fashion and design at an early age, Smith taught herself how to draw and create wearable art. In high school, she participated in several local fashion shows and productions as both a designer and model.

While attending Morgan State University, Smith continued to hone her design skills while pursuing a degree in Health Education. Shortly after graduating in 2007, she created New Vintage by Sam.

“My brand is a true reflection of me: quirky, fun, colorful, tastefully rebellious, always fabulous and designed with love,” Smith explained. “Each bracelet in the KOKD collection is simple, yet so intri-



Sam Smith’s (left) company, New Vintage by SAM launched its Knock Out Kidney Disease (KOKD) collection of bracelets with “purpose-filled” trinkets to benefit the National Kidney Foundation of Maryland (NKF-MD). Courtesy Photos

cate and detailed with various materials, personality accents and healing minerals to encourage peace and love energy while telling a colorful story.”

The collection’s inspiration came from two powerful women: Smith’s grandmother who passed away from kidney failure, and her friend, Franchon Crews: a member of Team USA, the #1 female boxer at the Olympic weight class of 165lbs. and a 2012 world silver medalist.

Crews, who lives in Baltimore and is hoping to make the 2016 Olympic team, learned about chronic kidney disease when her mother was diagnosed with it in 2005.

“I have always shined light on her condition and people have followed us through our journey,” Crews said. “I am glad to use my exposure, my face, my time and my sport to bring attention to the National Kidney Foundation of Maryland.”

Crews has “Rappelled for Kidney Health,” scaling down the Baltimore Marriott Waterfront 28 stories from the roof to the fifth floor pool deck, and participated in the Greater Baltimore Kidney Walk and Santé: A Culinary Odyssey— three signature events which all support NKF-MD’s patient services, education and research efforts.

No stranger to fashion herself, Crews is known as “The Heavy Hitting Diva,” (www.theheavyhittingdiva.com) who “represents strength, beauty, resilience, humor and creativity.”

When Crews asked Smith to team with her to help the Kidney Foundation, Smith graciously rose to the challenge to lend her artistic talent to the cause.

“It is a privilege to create this conscious collection of trinkets geared to helping spread awareness about kidney disease,” Smith said.

The KOKD collection is available online at: www.NewVintagebySam.com and at For Rent Shoes (www.for-rentshoes.com) in Baltimore’s located at 515 Cathedral Street in the Mt. Vernon

neighborhood in Baltimore. A portion of the proceeds from each sale will be donated to NKF-MD.

“We are thrilled that Sam is using her talent to spotlight kidney health awareness,” said Traci Barnett, president and CEO of the National Kidney Foundation of Maryland. “This is a unique way to raise awareness of a disease that affects 1 in 9 Americans each year.

“Here in Maryland there are approximately 9,300 people on dialysis at any given time,” she added. “Not only do we find kidney orange to be a very flattering color, but the beautiful ‘bling’ that Sam is creating is also a great way to focus on knocking out kidney disease.”

**Send your community calendar events
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Guest Editorials/Commentary

Blackonomics: Political Frustration

By James Clingman, NNPA Columnist

Writing has been a catharsis for me since my “angry days” in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s. I used to write “Last Poets” kind of stuff and just put it away afterwards. Writing was a release to lower the pressure in my mind about the state of our people. It’s much the same for me today, after nearly 23 years of writing Blackonomics. The larger context of my writing this column has evolved into a desire to inform, to educate, and to move our people to progressive economic action. I share ways and means through which we can achieve true freedom— economic freedom— in this nation.

I don’t write to impress, I write to express. That is to say, I do not intentionally use \$50 words; rather, I make every effort to assure that my readers understand and will be moved to act on the information I share. It seems my frustration from the 1960’s and 1970’s has reared its ugly head in the 21st century.

What bothers me most is our view of politics and those who constantly force-feed us their political rhetoric and their “politics-only” solutions to our problems. Instead of espousing economic solutions, they keep telling the young people to vote and “maach.” Marching is fine but without an end game, or if it’s done just for grandstanding and setting up VIP sections by the Marcher-in-Chief, Al Sharpton, what do we get from it except worn-out shoes? We must go from politics to “Power-tics.”

Economic and political leverage cause benefits to accrue to those who know how to play the game. Black folks, so emotionally invested in politics-only strategies, will never get what we say we want and need from politicians. They are too busy meeting the demands of the corporate moguls and their lobbyists, who know all too well how to play “Power-tics.”

The frustration and anger I feel when I see the continuous daily parade of Facebook videos showing someone getting beat down, tasered, kicked, or killed by police officers is overwhelming. The difference lies in whether we will continue to accept symbolism over substance when it comes to politics, and whether we are willing to use our economic leverage to solve our problems.

We are indeed a conflicted people right now. It seems we are willing to walk up to the line but not cross over into the arena where the real battle must take place. It seems we are willing to settle for so little in response to so much tragedy and injustice.

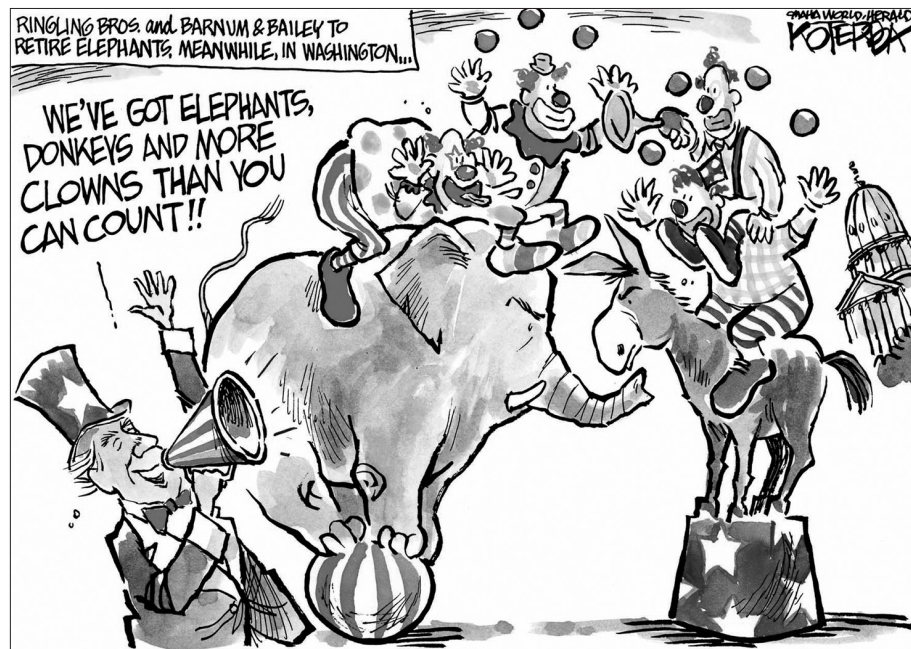
Sharpton vowed to come back to the nation’s capital “over and over again” until legislative action is taken so there is “justice for all.” Will someone tell me when “legislative action” will occur?; what it will look like?; and how it will occur? Without practical economic leverage, black folks will never have the political redress for which we march. Justice for all, is that a dog-whistle to let certain folks know that Sharpton is not really serious about justice for black people? These nebulous and tepid gestures in an effort to demonstrate the seriousness of our situation are insulting and patronizing.

Our young people are the ones fighting for justice; many of our older folks are just talking about it. That’s why many young people turned their backs on Eric Holder, stormed the stage during the March for Justice to speak, despite being told that they had no “V.I.P” passes and walked away when Al Sharpton started to speak.

Do our young people know something we don’t know? Are they willing to fight where we are not? I believe they do and I believe they are. They know it will take “Power-tics,” not politics, to make the changes they want to see.

The folks I am working with have an end game, a plan, and a solution. Contact me, I’ll share it with you.

James Clingman, founder of the Greater Cincinnati African American Chamber of Commerce, is the nation’s most prolific writer on economic empowerment for black people. He can be reached through his website: www.blackonomics.com.



Community Affairs

With less than one month from deadline, more than half of taxpayers still to file

Annapolis— With the tax-filing deadline less than a month away, Comptroller Peter Franchot encourages taxpayers who have yet to file to take advantage of all the conveniences of electronic filing.

“I want to encourage all taxpayers to file electronically,” Comptroller Franchot said. “It is the best way to ensure a quick refund and allows taxpayers who owe money to delay payment until April 30.”

To date, more than 1.24 million taxpayers have filed their personal tax returns electronically with more than 48,000 filing via paper. Based on 3.04 million returns filed last year, the returns filed so far represent 42 percent of last year’s total.

The Comptroller urges Marylanders to file electronically to ensure they receive their refund within days as opposed to weeks, as more than 1.24 million taxpayers already have taken his advice. To date, refund payments of more than \$941 million have been issued to more

than 969,000 taxpayers.

Comptroller Franchot also wants to make sure taxpayers are aware that simple mistakes in filing can significantly slow down the processing of a tax return and refund. To ensure an accurate return, taxpayers should remember to:

- Check Social Security numbers.
- Verify bank account (checking/saving) and routing numbers for direct deposit refunds and direct debit payments.
- Double-check calculations and
- Include all pertinent information including relevant forms and documents, such as the W-2 form.

Although electronic filing is strongly preferred, taxpayers filing paper returns should follow all the tips provided above, as well as remember to: write legibly, or type; use a pen; and sign the tax return.

Electronic filing saves the state significant money in processing costs. Each paper return costs the state more than \$2 to process, compared to 19 cents for e-filed returns resulting in savings of millions of dollars each year.

Free, state tax assistance is available at all of the agency’s 12 taxpayer service offices, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. For branch location information, visit; marylandtaxes.com.

188 Years of Black Press Excellence in USA

By Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr.
NNPA Columnist

In recognition of the 75th Anniversary of the National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA), I believe it is important to emphasize, both the historical and contemporary mission, value and success of the Black Press in America. For the past 188 years black Americans have labored diligently and responsibly to publish and distribute Black-owned newspapers in the interests of millions of Black Americans and others who cry out for freedom, justice, equality and empowerment.

What the first black American publishers and editors of Freedom's Journal, Samuel Cornish and John Brown Russwurm, worked hard to accomplish began a long and vibrant legacy that still continues today across the United States by publishers who are members of the NNPA. In the first edition of Freedom's Journal published on March 16, 1827 in New York City, Cornish and Russwurm clearly stated, "We wish to plead our own cause... Too long have others spo-

ken for us. Too long has the public been deceived by misrepresentations, in things which concern us dearly."

Freedom's Journal was widely read in the northeast of the U.S. and secretly read and admired throughout the South among those who were fighting the oppression and brutality of the slavery of African people in America. Thereafter over the next 188 wherever black Americans were concentrated across the nation, the emergence of the black-owned newspapers came forward with a firm commitment to excellence in jour-

who would seek to oppress and deny freedom and equality. Yet Frederick Douglass was also a freedom-fighting newspaper owner and publisher of The North Star. The first edition of The North Star was published on December 3, 1847 in Rochester, New York.

Douglass believed that "owning" The North Star gave him a strategic advantage to effectively articulate in the interests of black American liberation from slavery and poverty.

Concerning The North Star Douglass emphatically stated: "We are now about

The mission and purpose of the NNPA in part states: "To promote the interests of the Black Press by securing unity and action and all matters relative to the profession of journalism and the business of publishing... To advance the highest and best interest of all people of African descent."

Today in a growing multiracial, multilingual and multicultural society, it remains a critical necessity for all black-owned businesses, in particular black-owned newspapers and other media businesses, to be conscious of how the marketplace is changing and transforming. The point here is that black Americans cannot afford to understate the value and market impact of our businesses, institutions and communities.

The fact that we are trillion-dollar annual consumers in the American economy should translate more effectively and efficiently into strengthening black-owned businesses.

I am optimistic about the Black Press in the USA because I see greater business development opportunities today than ever before this period of time. Yet, we must all learn the lessons from our history and from the shining examples of excellence and determination of freedom-fighting publishers like Cornish, Russwurm and Douglass. From Selma to Ferguson, our struggle for freedom and empowerment continues.

Dr. Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr. is the President and CEO of the National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA) and can be reached at: dr.bchavis@nnpa.org

"From the very beginning of the Black Press in America, publishers and editors asserted their constitutional rights of freedom of speech and freedom of the press, as well as the fundamental human right of self-determination."

nalism and the empowerment of the black American community.

From the very beginning of the Black Press in America, publishers and editors asserted their constitutional rights of freedom of speech and freedom of the press, as well as the fundamental human right of self-determination. "Pleading our own cause" and speaking for the rights, news, aspirations and dreams of black America all continue today to be the undergirding foundation of the Black Press.

Frederick Douglass was one our great orators and leaders who exemplified the audacity and genius to challenge all

to assume the management of the editorial department of a newspaper, devoted to the cause of Liberty, Humanity and Progress. The position is one which, with the purest motives, we have long desired to occupy. It has long been our anxious wish to see, in this slave-holding, slave-trading, and Negro-hating land, a printing-press and paper, permanently established, under the complete control and direction of the immediate victims of slavery and oppression." This quote from Frederick Douglass certainly applies to some of the challenges that black Americans still face in 2015.

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Apple invests over \$40 million in technology at HBCUs

By Andrea Blackstone

On March 10, 2015, Apple and the Thurgood Marshall College Fund (TMCf), a Washington, D.C.-based non-profit organization, announced Apple's multi-year commitment to make over \$40 million in investments in HBCU technology students. The partnership with Apple will entail identifying, supporting and attracting students who strive to work in technology fields.

TMCf supports students enrolled in publicly supported Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), including Howard University. The organization currently provides direct support to approximately 2,500 students by awarding full tuition scholarships, providing leadership training and development and offering internships.

Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., president and CEO of TMCf, described the new relationship with Apple as "perfectly symbiotic."

"The biggest focus is jobs. Scholarships, internships and mentorship should produce full-time jobs at Apple," Taylor said. "Apple is going to get what it needs, which is a highly talented, diverse workforce. In our community, what it is going to do is give students who desire to participate in that very lucrative tech industry an opportunity to get in, and the real message is they can serve as examples for younger students who are in school contemplating what they want to do."

Taylor explained that Apple wants to encourage students who desire to build their own businesses to become involved in the app development space. The app development ecosystem is reportedly comprised of 99 percent Caucasians and Asians.

An additional component of the partnership will involve participation of HBCU faculty members. Since they are responsible for producing a pipeline of qualified talent, instructors will visit Apple's Cupertino, California campus. The educators will interact with Apple's technology engineers, while gaining up-to-date industry knowledge.

"What I love about this program is that it also helps build the capacity for HBCUs to prepare their students to compete for jobs on the West Coast. We have to ensure that Apple talks to our faculty and says to them your curriculum should look more like this. This is what we're looking for when you deliver a student to our door," Taylor said. "Some people almost naively think that you can just deliver up a 3.8 student from any school with a computer science degree and they should be able to get a job at Apple and if they don't, it's because Apple was racist. They just don't understand that a 3.8 in the wrong programming language doesn't translate."



*Johnny C. Taylor, Jr.,
President/CEO
Thurgood Marshall College Fund
Courtesy Photo*

Apple's partnership with TMCf and investment in HBCU students will positively impact the entire HBCU landscape.

"At TMCf, the quote is over \$40 million dollars. It is the largest, single gift made exclusively to HBCU," Taylor said. "TMCf offers a number of different types of scholarships, but for this particular program, we are going to select juniors only who have a 3.5 or better GPA in tech-related majors."

For the student portion of the program, the application window is scheduled for the fall and student programs will not take effect until January 2016. The faculty component will start immediately. The first group of HBCU faculty members will visit Cupertino this fall.

Taylor noted that Apple's investment in HBCU students is not a civil rights initiative or an affirmative action program.

"Apple has said every student who comes through this program has to be competitive, not black and competitive, but competitive. The only point that Apple is making, which I think is critical, is we have spent all of our time only fishing in the ponds that include Stanford, Yale and Harvard, so we are missing some really talented people. Let's go cast our net a little bit wider, because we are missing people who are eminently qualified," Taylor said.


To learn more about TMCf and the new partnership with Apple, visit: www.thurgoodmarshallfund.net

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Charity helps Baltimore resident with multiple myeloma

By Stacy M. Brown

Baltimore resident Raymonna Jean was diagnosed in 2013 with multiple myeloma, a type of cancer that affects the bone marrow.

With not much knowledge of what lay ahead and even less money to seek the kind of care needed to treat the disease, Jean turned to Good Days from CDF, a non-profit organization that's dedicated to helping ensure that no one living with a chronic condition has to choose between getting the medication they need and affording the necessities of every day life.

"They have made living with this so much easier because when you don't have money on hand it's tough," said Jean, a former nurse whom Good Days from CDF assisted with travel and medical expenses after she learned about the charity while seeking treatment in Arkansas.

The organization, which used to be known as the Chronic Disease Fund, helped to pay Jean's co-pays, which for her condition is quite expensive. They were also able to foot the bill and provide financial assistance for the extensive traveling involved for Jean's doctor's visits.

"We help patients suffering from chronic medical conditions who have limited financial means get access to the medications they need," said the organization's executive director Clorinda Walley. "Our program helps qualified patients pay their insurance co-pays so they can get immediate access to prescription medications that will give them relief from pain and suffering."

Founded in 2003, Good Days provided patients with more than \$200 million in assistance last year, a figure Walley said still falls well short of what's needed.

"I think even if we had \$400 million it wouldn't have been enough," she said. On average, those who received assistance earn about \$39,000 a year, but with co-pays and co-insurance payments eating up as much as \$12,000 from their incomes, the patients are left with



Good Days from CDF executive director Clorinda Walley also has battled a chronic illness. Good Days from CDF helps patients with chronic diseases to pay for their medical insurance co-pays, travel and other expenses.

Courtesy Photo

tough choices.

"In a lot of cases, it's do I buy my medication or do I eat, or do I pay my mortgage or feed my family," Wal-

ley said. "Education is another key to this and we must educate people about their diseases and their options."

With help from partners like Aetna, ACS, CVS Caremark, Walgreen's and various donors, contributions are made through a number of sources and Good Days from CDF is able to assist sufferers of chronic illnesses.

By partnering together and staying true to its core values of integrity, efficiency, dedication and compassion, Good Days from CDF is able to help improve the lives of millions of chronic disease patients across the nation, according to company officials.

The organization hopes to put a dent in a cold, but true fact, that millions of Americans are forced to go without medications that can better their lives, according to Walley. Although most chronic disease patients have valid insurance, it's estimated more than 30 percent of them cannot afford the high costs of their treatments and Good Days from CDF is working to change that.

"While helping patients get the medicine they need is what we do, helping them have more Good Days is our goal. We take pride in building long term relationships with our patients and offer a support system that extends far beyond financial assistance," she said.

"In this light, our organization underwent a name change, from the Chronic Disease Fund to Good Days from CDF. It's a transition which reflects our evolution as a foundation, befits the optimism in our strength, and identifies the core of our goals."

Walley says she is not just the executive director, but she is also a chronic disease sufferer.

"For me, the work we do at Good Days isn't just business—it's personal. Like many of you, I was diagnosed with a chronic disease in 2007," she said. "I understand the struggle you and your loved ones are going through. The emotional strain of the unknown coupled with the financial burden can be too much for one person to bear. That's why I'm here and that's why Good Days is here."

For more information about Good Days or to apply for assistance, visit www.gooddaysfromcdf.org or call 972-608-7141.

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Baltimore Water Project launched to help residents pay water bills

By Andrea Blackstone

Tiffani Bell and Kristy Tillman used social media to make a significant social impact and now their mission to do good deeds is spreading. Bell, a programmer who graduated from Howard University (HU) and Tillman, a graduate of Florida A&M University (FAMU), decided to help people in Detroit who were unable to pay their water bills.

The innovative idea was sparked by a Twitter conversation that took place in July 2014. The first version of the Detroit Water Project was quickly set up to test if people with delinquent water bills could be located. Afterwards, the website became more donor-centered.

Monetary donations are now made through www.detroitwaterproject.org.

"Most [donors] are in the United States, but we have had people who are giving as far away as Australia," Bell, 29, said.

In Detroit, Bell said that the city reported the average overdue water bill was approximately \$550. The water company in Detroit, and community organizations also provide referrals to people who need help. Individuals also discover the Detroit Water Project through word-of-mouth, social media or the press. Bell lives in Oakland, Calif. and now works full time on it. Up to five volunteers help return phone calls to inquirers.

The Baltimore Water Project was launched in February 2015, after Bell read that delinquent water bills are tacked on to property taxes in Baltimore just as they are in Detroit.

"What they will do is tack the water bill onto your property taxes. You can lose your house by not being able to pay your water bill. You have senior citizens who can't pay their water bill, and they



(Left) Tiffani Bell, 29, is the co-founder of the Detroit Water Project, which helps keep water service on in homes of people who cannot afford to pay their water bills also launched the Baltimore Water Project in February this year for the same purpose. This month Bell plans to meet with Baltimore City Councilman Nick J. Mosby about her recent work to help people in Baltimore.

Photo Credit: Hajj Flemings

attach it to your entire house that you may have had 30 or 40 years over a water bill," Bell said. "We're in the United States. It's supposed to be the most prosperous country in the world, but you have people which are right under our noses that we work with every day, we talk to, we see in public and they don't have water at home. This is the most basic thing we need besides air and there are people that don't have it."

Bell strives to assist applicants within a week, although resolving situations can take a longer or shorter time period. Ten people have applied for help in Baltimore so far. One local bill that was submitted to the Baltimore Water project was \$1,000. Steps are taken to ensure that people who apply for help genuinely need assistance, especially in cases where water bills are high.

"We may do more verification. We'll call that person, ask for more details, or ask for them to submit things like proof that they live in the house and of the situation. We find out why they owe that much in the first place. In certain cases,

we may not pay the entire bill off for them. In Detroit, for example, we'll do something like pay enough to get the water on if it is off, or pay enough to allow them to get on to a payment plan, if the situation is not exceptionally dire," Bell said.

Some applicants requesting help are experiencing employment problems while children reside in the home. In other situations, seniors with fixed incomes or people living on disability fall short financially. Applicants may need help paying water bills because their income disqualifies them from receiving help from existing programs. One woman who was placed on unpaid medical leave called to request emergency help.

"We...aim to spread this program around the United States, and also to get water recognized as a human right in the United States by law, meaning if you have financial hardships for example,

people are not able to turn your water off," Bell said.

The advocate who is making a positive change in two cities finds her work gratifying and exciting.

"It's a good feeling," Bell said. "It's nice to know that your skill set is being used to impact people."

Bell is scheduled to meet with Councilman Nick J. Mosby this month. She hopes to get his help to engage constituents who need assistance paying their water bills. Bell also wants to reach Baltimoreans who can help their neighbors in need by making donations.

To find out more information about the Baltimore Water Project or the Detroit Water Project, visit: www.detroitwaterproject.org/Baltimore or <https://www.facebook.com/theutilityproject> on Facebook. Baltimore residents who need assistance with their water bills may also call 1-844-505-4005.

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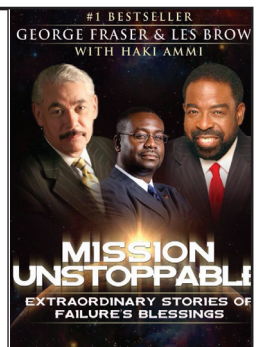
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Local counselor's new book touches “the soul”

By Stacy M. Brown

From a distance, Ellen Fitzkee stands out, then a glance at her resume confirms that she is not the typical Baltimore high school guidance counselor.

Fitzkee, a native of Philadelphia, coached Towson's women's basketball team for 13 years, winning 145 games and two coach of the year awards.

When her younger sister died suddenly, Fitzkee began struggling with her own mortality and she sought to make sense of it all. “You live and you die,” she said. “You try to make some fun along the way.” Fitzkee began to dig deep for answers.

In October, she put the finishing touches on and released a new book, “Conversations With My Soul: Stories and reflections on life, death, and love after loss,” a compilation of journal entries about pain, suffering and the every day struggles of life.

“It took me about a year to write and it took divine intervention to figure out what entries I should share,” Fitzkee said.

In “Conversations With My Soul,” she reflects on her own discovery of peace and happiness in the midst of loss and hopelessness. When her sister died unexpectedly, Fitzkee said her life came to a screeching halt.

“Even with my educational background and life experiences to call on to help me through this tragedy, I couldn't move forward and was stuck,” Fitzkee said. “At some point, I realized it is not just about me and my world. Each of us can find our own soul purpose by taking an inner journey.”

The 118-page book has proved cathartic, Fitzkee said, adding that some of her colleagues have either read or have started to read it and have offered their encouragement.

“The reaction has been overwhelmingly positive,” she said. “People said they've found it motivational and inspirational and it gives me great hope because with work like this you want to be able to touch some souls.”

Fitzkee has been a school counselor for 13 years and she's coached basketball since 1981. She said the only time she's taken off was after her sister died and that was just to gather herself.

“I'm back involved and coaching is important because it doesn't matter at what level you're coaching at, collegiate or high school, there is still the chance that you're positively affecting the lives of young people,” Fitzkee said.

With a master's degree in counselor education from McDaniel College, Fitzkee also consults part-time as a licensed mental health therapist.

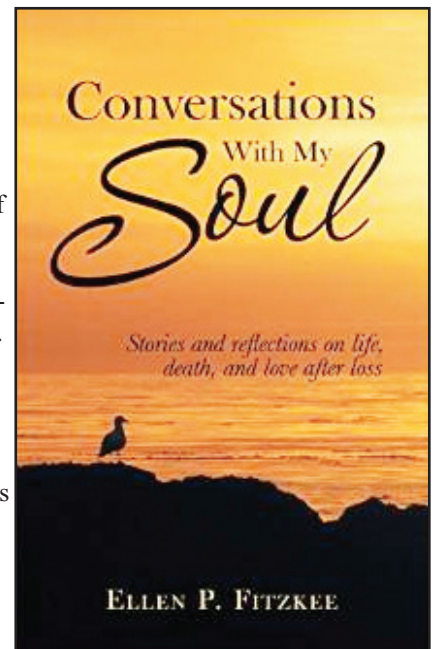
She holds an additional master's degree in liberal studies from Towson University and a bachelor's degree in psychology from Lafayette College.

She said she aspires to help others and incorporate her knowledge through books, life coaching and public speaking.

“When you're passionate about life, you do things that make you happy,” Fitzkee said. “I had considered not coaching anymore but the joy that it brings me helps me to be in my community and the rewards are wonderful.”

Fitzkee also says her new book helps readers with a painful yet valuable truth.

“Each one of us at different points in our lives needs to be aware that we will face grief and loss,” she said. “We're all connected and it's important that we understand that.”



The 'Greatest Show on Earth' Arrives in Baltimore



By Stacy M. Brown

The circus is coming to town—the “Greatest Show on Earth” hits the Royal Farms Arena beginning on Wednesday, March 25, 2015.

There will be a noticeable absence from the latest installment of the famed Ringling Bros. and Barnum and Bailey Circus. How can you not notice when the big elephant isn’t in the room?

As first reported by ABC News last month, the 145-year-old circus will be without Asian elephants, though the circus owners, the Feld Family of Feld Entertainment Inc., say it will feature other extraordinary animal performers, including lions, tigers, horses, llamas, goats, dogs and camels.

“This is the most significant change we have made since we founded the Ringling Bros. Center for Elephant Conservation in 1995,” Kenneth Feld, chairman and CEO of Feld Entertainment, said in a statement. “When we did so, we knew we would play a critical role in saving the endangered Asian elephant for future generations, given how few Asian elephants are left in the wild.”

ABC News says the company recognized that the

omission of elephants is an unprecedented change in the show’s history. However, fans have remained excited about the “Legends” installment of the circus where officials have promised they will experience unimaginable family fun, as performers from around the world attempt awe-inspiring feats of daring, spectacles of strength and thrills of wonder to summon the mythical and mysterious creatures of the past like a unicorn, a Pegasus and a “Woolly Mammoth.”

“It’s should be a great, great show,” a company spokesperson said, perhaps an attempt to stem some of the disappointment of Baltimore area fans who may have been looking forward to seeing the famous elephants.

Fans will again see Johnathan Lee Iverson, the youngest and the first African-American ringmaster in the circus’ history, doing what he does best. The former Boys Choir of Harlem lead tenor and once one of Barbara Walters’ 10 Most Fascinating People, who once played for legends like Lena Horne, will again don the iconic top hat and lead the show.

While the absence of the Asian elephants may be a sore spot and although they say that they are not pleased with the decision to remove them, officials at the Circus Fans Association of America still expect the

event to be loaded with family fun.

“We can expect that this great American enterprise will continue in perhaps bold new ways while continuing to address the very real concern for the survival of elephants and all endangered species,” said Gary Payne, the national president of the Circus Fans Association of America.

Tickets for the circus at Royal Farms Arena can be purchased at www.ticketmaster.com. Children two years and older will need a ticket. Event dates are 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, March 25, Thursday, March 26 and at 10:30 a.m. and 7:30 p.m. on Friday, March 27 and at 11:30 a.m., 3:30 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. on Saturday, March 28. There will be two shows on Sunday, March 29 at 1 p.m. and 5 p.m.

The circus resumes with single shows starting at 7:30 p.m. on Tuesday, March 31, Wednesday, April 1, and Thursday, April 2. The final weekend will have two shows on Friday, April 3 at 1 p.m. and 7:30 p.m., three shows on Saturday, April 4, at 11:30 a.m., 3:30 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. and two final events on Sunday, April 5 at 1 p.m. and 5 p.m.

Playwright Ursula V. Battle's 'Discord in the Choir' presented

Unified Voices of Johns Hopkins to present Gospel Musical

Gospel Trio "Serenity" and WEAA'S Ernestine Jones to perform in March 27-29, 2015 production at Turner Auditorium

Baltimore— Unified Voices of Johns Hopkins (UV) will present Ursula V. Battle's "DisChord in The Choir." The gospel stage play musical production is being directed by Dr. Gregory William Branch, and will be presented Friday, March 27, 2015 at 7 p.m.; Saturday, March 28, 2015 at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m.; and Sunday, March 29, 2015 at 5 p.m. in Turner Auditorium, located in the Johns Hopkins Hospital Ross Research Building, 720 Rutland Ave., Baltimore, MD 21205. Baltimore gospel singing group Serenity and WEAA 88.9 FM Gospel Grace on-air personality Ernestine Jones will be performing in the production.

The production is inclusive of soul-stirring singing, side-splitting comedy, gripping drama, and powerful ministry. The play's riveting storyline centers around the dramatic chain of events which follows the sudden death of The United in Victory Tabernacle on the Hill Freewill Baptist Catholic and Episcopal Church of God's longtime musician, Dr. William Nelson Madison, III. Following the death of Dr. Madison, the choir can't quite sing right, the ushers can't quite march right, and the church's pastor— Rev. Right Just, no longer has the legendary musician on the organ to accompany his sermons.

The production also touches on addiction— particularly the struggle of a youngster named "Junior Jacobs" who becomes addicted to crack cocaine after running with the wrong crowd. Through ministry and song, this production illustrates how we can overcome addiction. "DisChord in The Choir" also features musicians Jimmy Riley, David White, and a powerful cadre of other talented organists, pianists, singers, actors, actresses, comedians and other performers.

Founded in 1993, UV is a gospel choir that consists of a diverse group of indi-



Ernestine Jones of WEAA 88.9 FM's "Gospel Grace" will be performing.

viduals with different personalities, lifestyles, and backgrounds working together to bridge the gap between the medical institution and the historic East Baltimore community. Under the direction of Dr. Branch, who is executive director and co-founder of UV, the choir has remained goodwill ambassadors by singing songs of hope, health and healing through harmony at Hopkins.

Dr. Branch has also directed multiple stage play productions including "A Raisin in The Sun," "Dreamgirls," "Spelling Bee," "Steel Magnolias," "Ain't Misbehavin'" and "Little Shop of Horrors." Dr. Branch also serves as the director of Health and Human Services of Baltimore County. Playwright Ursula V. Battle is a journalist, public relations professional, and CEO of Battle Stage Plays. The return of "DisChord in The Choir" is an updated version of the highly successful original show, which debuted in 2008. In addition to "DisChord in The Choir," Battle's stage play productions include "The Teachers' Lounge" and "The Crown of Glory & The Agony of Deceit," and "FOR BET-



Dr. Gregory Wm. Branch, director and Ursula V. Battle, playwright.
Courtesy Photos



"Serenity" will be singing in the production.

TER OR FOR WORSE."

Tickets are \$15 in advance and \$25 at the door. For additional information or tickets, call Unified Voices at (410) 955-8888, or send an email to

uvofjhmi@aol.com or visit www.unifiedvoices.com. You can also call Battle Stage Plays at (443) 531-4787 or visit www.battlestageplays.com.

Life in Baltimore: Weaving the Stories of Women's Lives

By Brenda Bowe-Johnson

Part II: "Weaving the Stories of Women's Lives" is the 2015 Theme of National Women's History Month which is quite an appropriate theme for this group of women who are being honored. The stories of women's lives and their choices encourages girls and young women to think bigger and bolder. Knowing women's achievements challenge stereotypes and upends social assumptions about who women are and what women can accomplish today. Though women are in key positions in politics, CEO's of companies, and leaders in the communities, there are still many issues to be addressed which affect the daily lives of girls and young women. It is imperative that women continue to strive for excellence and share their stories with others.



Dr. Gina McKnight-Smith,

Dr. Gina McKnight-Smith, aside from being a Drug Intelligence Pharmacist for the fourth largest prescription benefit manager (PBM) in the country, CataMaran Health, she is the President/CEO of an independent healthcare consulting firm called Medication Information Means Empowerment (MIME), LLC. Dr. Smith is a graduate of Western High School, with an earned Bachelor of Arts in Biology, University of Maryland Baltimore County; a Doctor of Pharmacy from University of Maryland Baltimore, School of Pharmacy and a Masters in Business from University of Baltimore Merrick School of Business. Dr. Smith always knew healthcare was her passion as she celebrates 18 years as a practicing pharmacist. She has practiced in a variety of settings including community,

hospital outpatient, long-term care pharmacy consulting, PBM pharmacy management, independent medication consulting and government/regulatory pharmacy practice.

Dr. Smith's professional organization affiliations include the Maryland Pharmaceutical Society, American Society of Consultant Pharmacists, Association of Managed Care Pharmacy, and the National Pharmaceutical Association. She continues her commitment to the profession by serving as a mentor and preceptor for several schools of pharmacy. Dr. Smith is also a member of the Board Certified Pharmacotherapy Specialists, and a Certified Geriatric Health Information Technology Specialist. She has co-authored a chapter entitled *Strategies for Identifying Health*

Disparities and Improving Cultural Competence in the book titled *The Pharmacist in Public Health: Education, Applications and Opportunities*.

Dr. Smith is a Baltimore native, and daughter of George and Barbara McKnight. She continues to demonstrate her civic responsibility through her service as a Commissioner on the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights. Additional affiliations with social and community service oriented organizations include Rho Xi Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. and the Patapsco River Chapter of The Links. Dr. Smith continues to drive her passion by giving back to the community that has given her so much. She lives by the words "To whom much is given, much is required."



Autumn Melinda Anderson

Baltimorean **Autumn Melinda Anderson** is a Counselor at Baltimore City College, her alma mater. She is the daughter of Calvin and Helen Anderson. Miss Anderson graduated with honors from West Virginia State University with a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education. Because of her academic excellence, Autumn was awarded a fellowship at Marshall Uni-

versity and graduated with a Masters degree in school counseling. Upon returning to Baltimore she began her teaching career in the Baltimore City Public School System. Miss Anderson has always had a love for working with young people. To see young people thrive is her most fulfilling reward.

Miss Anderson serves as the Church Registrar at St. James Episcopal Church

and is a member of the Fellowship of St. Francis. Additionally, Autumn is a member of Rho Xi Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. and is the secretary of the Baltimore Charm City Chapter of the West Virginia Alumni Association. Miss Anderson's words to live by: If plan A doesn't work, just remember there are 25 other letters in the alphabet.



Kaliq Hunter Simms

Kaliq Hunter Simms is Director of Diversity and Multicultural Education at the Park School of Baltimore. Kaliq graduated from Seton-Keogh and Morgan State University with honors. Kaliq received a Fulbright fellowship to teach English as a second language in South Korea. Upon completion of the Fulbright, Kaliq went on to earn a Master of Education degree from Harvard University School of Education. Kaliq joined the Roland Park Country School

faculty in 1998 as an Upper School English teacher. During her tenure at RPCS, Kaliq served as Dean of the Ninth Grade and Director of Diversity and Equity Education.

In 2014, she accepted a new position as Director of Diversity and Multicultural Education at the Park School. She is the chair of the Baltimore Student Diversity Leadership Conference and serves on the Association of Independent Maryland/Washington DC School's Diversity

Board. She has presented at the National Association of Independent Schools' People of Color Conference on the topic, Data-Driven Diversity Work in Schools. She also has presented workshops on the enduring value of historically black colleges/universities, especially her alma mater, Morgan State University.

Mrs. Simms is the daughter of the late Joseph Hunter and Anita Turks Hunter and the mother of two.

How important it is for us to recognize and celebrate our heroes and she-roes —Maya Angelou

Three Baltimore women find enrichment in business



By Stacy M. Brown

As mothers, daughters, sisters and aunts, Tehma Hallie Smith, Ronae Brock and Michelle Davenport say they were bothered by the possible side effects connected to chemicals in the products they were using.

Realizing that, like many other women who make purchasing decisions for skin care products for their families, the three women said they began to give more thought to potentially harmful ingredients.

“We understood the science and reasoning behind why preservatives and other chemicals were being used, however, we felt that there had to be a better way,” Smith said.

So, they came up with a product line of their own and started Earth’s Enrichments, a local organic body and skin care company that prides itself on being health conscious and environmentally friendly.

Smith says Earth’s Enrichments, whose slogan is “Enriched by Earth ...

Deserved by everyone,” offers premium United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) certified organic skin care products that are made with the best ingredients. Their products, which include organic bar soaps, sugar scrubs, bath salts, body balms and lip balms, do not contain parabens, sulfates, phthalates, petroleum, artificial coloring, artificial fragrances or preservatives.

“As we ventured out on the journey to create skin care products which were uncompromising, healthy and luxurious, we took a year and a half to research the skin care market,” said Smith, a graduate of Lincoln University who also holds an entrepreneurship and new ventures MBA from Pennsylvania State University and a Juris Doctorate from the Temple University Beasley School of Law.

“This led us to look into natural and organic soaps and other skin care products. We could easily read and understand these ingredients. We could also do research and find out about the soothing and healing properties that

these ingredients provide. We were sold,” she said.

Her partners also used their vast knowledge and talents to help create the business that has been thriving since they began in 2012.

Brock spent six months in France studying at the American University and she has worked at Personal Products Company and McNeil Consumer Products Company, both subsidiaries of Johnson & Johnson. As product director, she was responsible for marketing adult Tylenol, Tylenol PM, and Sesame Street Vitamins.

Johnson, whose background includes manufacturing and government contracting, once served as a vice president of a military supplier corporation.

“Starting and growing a business is very time consuming and demanding,” Smith said. “So as entrepreneurs and family women it can be very challenging balancing work and family life. That is why we are glad that we have each other to rely on and help take some of

the pressure off one another during various hectic times both at work and at home.”

Smith said goals for the company include increasing their online sales, expanding retail and to create new product lines such as hair care, a men’s line and specialty soaps. She said she realizes that all of this takes time, effort and, most of all, patience.

“To own your own business you must plan and have patience. In planning you must research the market that your business is in, you must pull together a great team with expertise that can assist you in starting your business, and you must create a solid foundation for your business as it is today and a strong strategy for the future of your business,” Smith said. “Then you must be patient. Success does not happen overnight.”

For more information about Earth’s Enrichments, visit www.earthsenrichments.com.

Health officials unveil new suicide prevention tool

By Stacy M. Brown

Suicide accounts for more than one percent of all deaths in the United States, making it the eighth leading cause of fatalities in the country.

Also, more years of life are lost to suicide than to any other single cause except heart disease and cancer, based on statistics from the Alexandria, Virginia-based advocacy group, Mental Health America – or MHA.

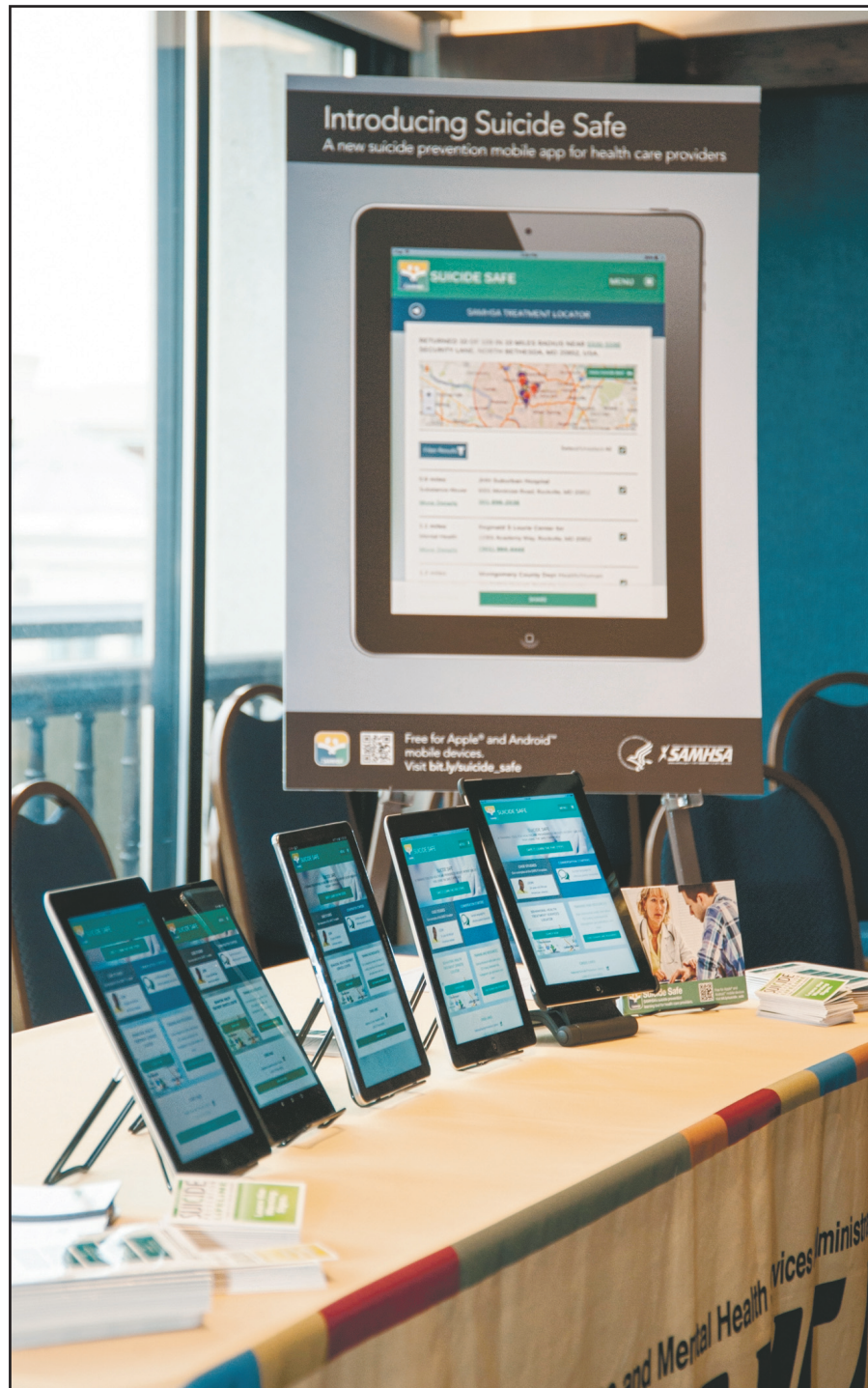
In Baltimore City, reportedly 8.2 per 100,000 individuals commit suicide and 30,000 United States residents die by suicide each year, while an additional 500,000 attempt to end their life.

Mental health officials have said repeatedly that people considering suicide usually do seek help; for example, nearly three-fourths of all suicide victims visit a doctor in the four months before their deaths, and half in the month before.

Now, professionals at the Rockville, Maryland-based Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) have developed a new tool that they hope will help prevent suicides. It's a free mobile app, called "Suicide Safe," that shows behavioral health care providers how to better evaluate patients at risk.

"Suicide devastates lives throughout all parts of our nation, but it is a public health issue that is preventable and SAMHSA is working to provide people on the front lines with resources they need to save lives," said Pamela S. Hyde, the administrator for the SAMHSA, a branch of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

"'Suicide Safe' is a major step forward in suicide prevention. The app gives behavioral and primary care providers an essential and modern prevention tool at their fingertips to help address suicide risk with their patients," said Hyde as she announced the new app at the National Press Club on March 11, 2015.



Maryland-based Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has introduced a new suicide prevention app that can be downloaded to a mobile or computer device.
Courtesy Photo/SAMHSA

"Suicide Safe" is based on the suicide assessment five-step evaluation and triage (SAFE-T) practice guidelines, according to mobilehealthnews.com.

Providers can use the app to learn the five steps in the SAFE-T practice guidelines, download the guidelines to work in offline mode, learn how other providers have used the SAFE-T approach through case studies and access conversation starters as well as other tips for speaking with patients about suicide.

The app also lists crisis line phone numbers and offers a location finder feature so physicians can refer patients to the appropriate behavioral treatment center.

It also provides tips for professionals on how to communicate effectively with patients, SAMHSA officials said. Unveiled to mark the 10-year anniversary of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, which has answered more than seven million calls since 2005, officials said the app is available on Apple and Android phones, as well as Google Play.

"I think that the interesting thing is that people kind of underestimate just how isolating depression can be," said Misha Kessler, a suicide survivor who attended and spoke at the unveiling of the new app.

"I do believe it will save more lives because there's actually statistics about the amount of people that visit clinicians in the time before suicide attempts," Kessler said, who also reflected on his own suicide attempt which he said was the result of self-hatred.

He said anyone who experiences such feelings or thoughts of suicide, shouldn't be afraid to speak out and talk to someone.

"The possibility that you're experiencing something that you can get help for, I think that's what's most important," he said.

For more information about the app, visit www.store.samhsa.gov/apps/suicidesafe/.

"I think suicide is sort of like cancer was 50 years ago. People don't want to talk about it, they don't want to know about it. People are frightened of it, and they don't understand, when actually these issues are medically treatable." — Judy Collins

Colorectal cancer information that you should know

By Andrea Blackstone

March is National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month. Dr. Glen Gibson, a surgical oncologist at the DeCesaris Cancer Institute at Anne Arundel Medical Center (AAMC), says being informed about colorectal cancer and getting screened for it can be extremely beneficial.

“As far as nationally, colorectal cancer is the third most common cancer in men and women. It is also the third most common cause of cancer death in men and women nationwide. It is about 150,000 new cases of colorectal cancer every year in America,” notes Gibson.

According to Gibson, diagnosed cases of the disease in the United States are about equal between men and women, although the number may be slightly higher in the male population. On the other hand, African Americans are at a higher risk.

“It seems like African Americans are the highest ethnic group with the risk of getting or dying from colon cancer. They are more than 10 percent more likely than Caucasians to get colorectal cancer. No one really knows why that is.”

Gibson explained that home screening kits that check for certain elevated chemicals found in many people with colon cancer can show up in their stool. Kits should not be used by themselves. They do not prove that a person does not have colon cancer. Getting a colonoscopy is an important step in screening for colorectal cancer.

“It [colorectal cancer] is very preventable. The key to preventing it is getting a colonoscopy when you turn 50,” Gibson said. “It is very important in colorectal cancer to get appropriate screening. The reason for that is a colonoscopy is very important, because with colon cancer, it starts out as a polyp. It can remain a polyp for five to 10 years before it becomes a cancer. So simply by removing the polyp, you have prevented it from turning into cancer. Furthermore, if you remove a small cancer, then the treatment for that is to remove part of the intestine with surgery. But if it is a very early cancer, then you don’t need any



See what colon cancer looks like up close by visiting the Anne Arundel Medical Center mega colon at the April docsTALK on April 30, 2015 at AAMC Belcher Pavilion in Annapolis and at the Bowie Baysox game on May 20, 2015.

Courtesy photos

more treatment. What I mean by that is you don’t need any chemotherapy after your surgery.”

Gibson reminded that polyps are found through colonoscopy testing.

“In cases where non-cancerous polyps are removed, patients would likely be instructed to get another colonoscopy in a few years. If the colonoscopy is completely clean, you can wait five to 10 years to follow up with another one,” Gibson said.

Most cancers are reportedly hereditary in some way, although most people who are diagnosed with colon cancer do not have any risk factors. Individuals whose first-degree relatives were diagnosed with the disease are at a slightly higher risk.

“It’s one of those things where it seems to be related and run in families, but we’re not sure how. The problem is that colon cancer is so common. One in 17 people gets colorectal cancer. It’s hard to

find a pattern with family members or with any kind of syndrome in most people,” Gibson said.

Individuals should pay attention to warning signs that could indicate a need to seek medical attention.

“The other important thing is...seeing your doctor if you have certain symptoms that could suggest something wrong is going on with your intestines. And what I mean by that is unexplained weight loss, or trouble moving your bowels that is new or different than it had been for more than just a few weeks in a row, or blood in your stool, or a narrowing of what your stool looks like when it comes out,” Gibson said.

Aspirin or ibuprofen may reduce the risk of colon cancer. Although unproven, studies have shown a trend in reduced polyps or cancers.

“The other things that may help are fiber in your diet and calcium supple-

ments,” Gibson said.

In the last 10-15 years, advances have been made in colorectal cancer surgery.

“The surgery for colon and rectal cancer has become much less invasive with minimally invasive approaches. That’s been a real nice advance, especially in this area. Most people who get surgery for colorectal cancer have it done with a minimally invasive approach, and that’s much, much better than the national average where only about a third of people have a minimally invasive approach to their colon cancer.”

A docsTALK event will be held on April 30, 2015 at AAMC Belcher Pavilion in Annapolis. Free information about screening for colorectal cancer and other health tests will be available.

To register, visit:
<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/docstalk-spring-screenings-tickets-16138851740>.

Indie Soul Spotlight: John R. Lamkin, II

“I love performing and teaching others about music and Jazz. It’s a part of life” — John R. Lamkin II

When you talk jazz and music with John R. Lamkin II, be prepared to talk for hours about the many places he has been, the artists he has performed with, and his love of teaching music to children.

“Music has been a part of my life for so long. I want others to experience the music that I so appreciate,” said Lamkin.

The native of Atlantic City, New Jersey, credits friends and family for support of his career, but more importantly God.

“You have to have a very strong family support system as a musician, or any artist for that matter, to survive in this business. You must be grounded spiritually first and foremost, because without that, you can’t make it,” said Lamkin

John R. Lamkin II, who plays trumpet, is a historian and an icon in the music business in Baltimore. He understands the value of music and its cultural significance. He really wants Baltimore to get behind a bigger and greater jazz movement.

“We have certain areas in Baltimore that get the music but I think we can do a better job of music education and support of events. Jazz is a huge part of the black experience and we need to teach that or it will be lost,” he said.

Lamkin was a music educator at University of Maryland Eastern Shore. He has numerous stories about taking students to see different shows and to hear artists perform. He lights up when talking about those experiences with kids. Every summer, he and his wife offer a music camp where they teach music to students in the Baltimore.

By far one of his greatest accomplishments was being able to perform with his son. “The family is a musical family. I am truly blessed,” said Lamkin.

You can catch a live performance by John R. Lamkin II at 4th Thursday’s at Phase 10, located at 885 N Howard Street in Baltimore at 7 p.m.



John R. Lamkin Photo: Umbrella Syndicate

Indie Soul Students of the Week:

Cori Grainger, Naysa Reames, Shamon Thomas-Green, and Jessica Cooley

Representing the ladies of Baltimore Leadership School for Young Women and Office of College Counseling, these students deserve a standing ovation!

1. Baltimore Leadership School for Young Women (BLSYW) juniors Cori Grainger and Naysa Reames were both accepted into Princeton University’s LEDA Scholar Program after a lengthy and competitive process. Only 100 students from across the country were accepted to spend seven weeks at Princeton to participate in The Aspects of Leadership Summer Institute, held annually on the Princeton University campus. The program focuses on leadership training, writing instruction, standardized test preparation, and college guidance. Check out the program link: <http://www.ledascholars.org>.

2. Junior Shamon Thomas-Green is one of only 30 students accepted to participate in Camp Psych at Gettysburg College-- a unique opportunity for students interested in psychology. The goal of Camp Psych is to provide a window into how psychological science works and prepare future leaders in the field. Check out the program link: <http://www.gettysburg.edu/camppsych/>.

3. Jessica Cooley, a sophomore at BLSYW, has been selected out of 80 applicants from across Baltimore

City as a MERIT (Medical Education Resources Initiative for Teens) Scholar. The selection process included a written application and a rigorous three-week tryout called the Medical Leadership Course where students participated in medical discussions about Ebola, Huntington’s Disease, and STDs, completed a CPR simulation, created a poster presentation about a health care disparity, and learned how to take blood pressure.

As part of MERIT, participants will receive free SAT prep, college admissions and financial aid guidance, and leadership development seminars. In addition, they will complete three paid summer internships working in local hospitals and research laboratories. Each scholar will also be paired with a college or graduate student mentor for the next three years. MERIT will continue to provide guidance to these scholars throughout college as well. Check out the program link: www.meritbaltimore.org.

During the school year, Indie Soul will spotlight a student who excels in academics and in the community. To nominate someone for “Student of the Week,” call 410-366-3900 ext. 3016 or email pdemps@btimes.com with “Student of the Week” in the subject line.



(Left to right) Cori Grainger, Naysa Reames, Shamon Thomas-Green and Jessica Cooley. Courtesy Photo

Actor pitches psychological thriller about drugs, recovery

By Stacy M. Brown

Shiek Mahmud-Bey could be a true Hollywood story that could eventually turn up in an episode of “Unsung” on BET. Not because he has ever been in over his head or has been on Skid Row and his career has fizzled—not by any stretch!

Fans and critics alike may recall “Night Falls on Manhattan,” a 1996 film loosely based on the infamous Bronx shootout between suspected drug dealer Larry Davis and New York police. The film featured Mahmud-Bey at his best, even outshining other seasoned actors including Andy Garcia, James Gandolfini and Richard Dreyfus.

The Brooklyn born actor who was raised in Queens Village by his father, an Army Sergeant Major, and his mother, a beauty salon owner, even managed to upstage Denzel Washington’s big screen performance of boxer Rubin Hurricane Carter with a brilliant off-Broadway depiction of the boxer in, “The Way Out.”

“He may not be a household name, but he’s one of Hollywood’s most talented actors,” wrote a reviewer in Playbill.

Now, Mahmud-Bey, a former New York Golden Gloves finalist and NYU student who has worked with Robert DeNiro, Joaquin Phoenix, Nicholas Cage, Joe Mantegna and many other A-list actors and who once held a leading role in the former NBC detective drama, “The Profiler,” is tackling a new challenge.

He has created, written, directed, produced and stars in the television psychological drama, “The Inner Circle.”

“Right now, I’m trying to reinvent myself as someone who creates a film, directs it, produces it and acts in it,” he said. “For me, my work as an artist is to build understanding and compassion because with understanding comes compassion.”

The hour-long drama, which is being shopped to HBO, Netflix and others, is a true and gritty look at how substance abuse reaches across ethnicity, class, gender and age groups.

Set in hardscrabble Detroit, the series takes a fresh new perspective of how the



Actor/director Shiek Mahmud-Bey hopes his new television series, “The Inner Circle,” will be a winner. Mahmud-Bey created, wrote, directed, produced, as well as stars in the psychological drama.
Courtesy Photo

abuse of drugs and alcohol is costly for our society and, left untreated, places a burden on the workplace, healthcare system, and many communities.

“The Inner Circle” depicts the suffering of patients and their loved ones and Mahmud-Bey said each episode brings audiences deeper into each of the member’s lives and closer to understanding their pain as well as the circumstances that led them to rock bottom.

While the drama symbolizes the patients in the group, it also represents the inner circle of deep, debilitating pain that addicts cover up with layers of denial, lies, and self-loathing.

The resulting compulsive behaviors, which the members sometimes can no longer control, lead them to rehab, some by choice, some by family interventions and some by court order.

“Many people assume that drug abusers lack moral principles or will-power and that they could stop using drugs if they wanted to,” said Mahmud-Bey, who plays Dr. Benjamin Taylor, a seemingly calm and in control therapist with the quiet confidence of a self-made

man and the swagger of someone who has achieved his goals.

Dr. Taylor operates a drug rehab facility that will eventually come to house a superstar shortstop, ostensibly from the New York Yankees, an A-list Hollywood actress and others. But, as Dr. Taylor seeks to help his “Inner Circle” of clients, there’s a more personal battle on the home front with his 18-year-old daughter and her divisive grandmother.

He says his new pilot, “The Inner Circle,” makes him reflect on the late Philip Seymour Hoffman whom he worked closely with and also about a member of his own family who battled problems with alcohol and one whom Mahmud-Bey regrettably hasn’t seen or heard from in more than a decade.

“I couldn’t understand compassion before, but substance abuse is real and this television show brings that to the fore,” he said.

Addiction can either be subtle or, in some cases, quick.

“Several contributing factors may be the cause of substance abuse, such as environment and genetics, which makes

quitting difficult. This makes spreading information about the biological, environmental and developmental complexities of drug addiction, along with prevention and treatment initiatives, an imperative,” said Mahmud-Bey, who is also working on a new talk show that he created called, “Psychological Perspectives with Doc B.”

The talk show features co-creator Detroit Psychologist Dr. LaSonia Barlow, a Diplomat Forensic Examiner, who has done extensive work with the substance abuse and mental health population.

Among the topics that the talk show will include is the use of the controversial AIDS drug Truvada and children of incarcerated parents.

The talk show and the new drama about addiction fit neatly in what is already shaping up to be a busy year for the actor.

“It’s going to be my year,” he said. “I’ve got a lot going on but these are important projects and if I don’t help people to evolve and grow, then I’ve failed as an artist.”

Baltimore Times

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Hollywood comes to Annapolis for annual film festival

By Stacy M. Brown

Hollywood is making an appearance on the Chesapeake. The Annapolis Film Festival seeks to make the third annual installment its best with a lineup that features shorts and documentary films as well as an array of independent selections that include the narrative features, “Adventures in Comedy,” and “Appropriate Behavior,” as well as the documentaries, “Above and Beyond,” and “Burden of Peace.”

The festival, which kicks off on March 26, 2015 in downtown Annapolis, will also feature the retrospective, “The President’s Analyst.”

“Guests at this year’s Annapolis Film Festival can expect to see amazing films, 70 plus, on a wide range of subjects with something to suit everyone,” said festival Director Lee Anderson. “Our venues are within walking distance in downtown Annapolis and we have three City Circulators at our disposal to carry guests around.”

Opening night at St. John’s College Key Auditorium kicks off the festival and Loews Annapolis Hotel will act as Festival Central, while O’Callaghan’s Hotel will serve as the main venue for panels and workshops.

The festival screening venues include Maryland Hall for the Creative Arts; St. John’s College – Key Auditorium; Asbury United Methodist Church on West Street; St. Anne’s Parish Hall; and Annapolis Elementary School, according to the festival’s website.

Special showcases will include films by and about the African-American, Jewish and LGBT experience, and the Student Showcase, which will feature 12 shorts. Other film topics include sailing, comedies, veterans, mental health, global politics, world cinema and conversations with surprise industry guests.

“[You can] add in 60 filmmakers and VIPs; a slate of panels from, ‘The Art of the Pitch to Movie Critics: What Were They Thinking?’ said Patti White, also a festival director.

“African-American and Environmental Showcases; films about the Jewish



Lee and Patti: Festival directors Lee Anderson and Patti White.
Photos courtesy of The Annapolis Film Festival

and LGBT experiences; “The Rewired” starring Hugh Grant as our opening night film; and some great parties and you have the 3rd annual Annapolis Film Festival, a touch of Hollywood on the Chesapeake,” White said of the festival.

One of the featured documentaries, “Back on Board,” is a glimpse into the life of four-time Olympic champion Greg Louganis. It chronicles Louganis’ rise from a difficult upbringing to his leading role as an openly gay athlete living with HIV.

Also, Rory Culkin, the brother of “Home Alone” star Macaulay Culkin and the star of “Gabriel” will attend the festival. “Gabriel” counts as a powerful movie about a troubled young man who is not aware of how pervasive and far reaching his own mental illness is. The screening will take place at 5 p.m. on Saturday, March 28th at St. John’s College and will be followed by a question and answer session with Culkin and the writer and director, Lou Howe.

VIP pass holders to the festival will be able to listen in on behind-the-scenes

talks about the business of directing, acting and producing, which will take place at Crush Winehouse starting at 9 a.m. on Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

The event also caters to those who may aspire to become a screenwriter or even a director with volunteers being assigned to a number of key positions that can even lead to their big break.

Tickets for the festival are \$12 for adults and \$8 for seniors and students. A four-day festival pass is \$105, while four-day student passes are \$40. All four-day passes include the opening night film, the after party and unlimited films and panel discussions. One-day festival passes also are available for \$40.

Festival passes can be purchased at www.annapolisfilmfestival.com. For tickets and the full schedule of films and events, visit www.annapolisfilmfestival.com or the festival’s Facebook page at www.facebook.com/annapolisfilmfestival.

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Basil Waine Kong considered Mark Twain of Jamaica releases new book

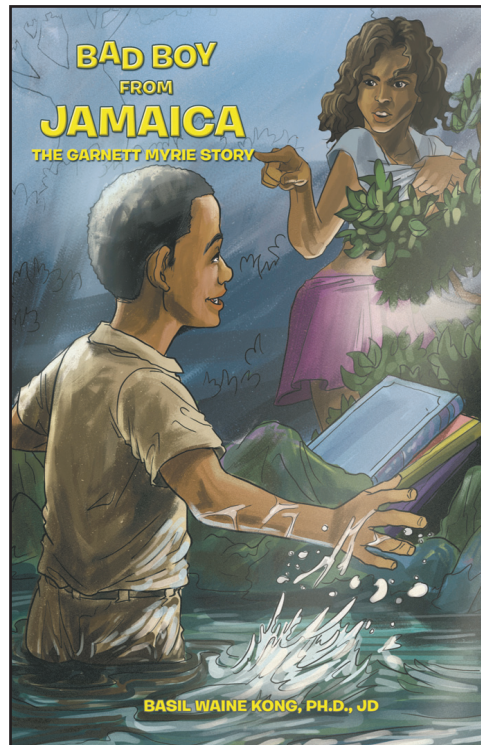
Thomaston, Georgia— Garnett Myrie was just a Jamaican boy from the countryside who was always in the midst of mischief growing up. As a young man he fought in the war of liberation in Angola and later returned to his home country to become a successful businessman and politician helping to improve the lives of his people.

In Dr. Basil Waine Kong's new book, "Bad Boy from Jamaica: The Garnett Myrie Story," he celebrates the culture of Jamaica— both good and bad— with his friend's life story. He felt that Myrie embodied the typical lifestyle of those who remember growing up in Jamaica and was inspired by his journey from a troubled teen to an upstanding citizen.

"I was looking for a vehicle to showcase Jamaican culture and thought my neighbor and friend, Garnett Myrie, was perfect. He has lived an interesting life," Dr. Kong said.

In the mid-1900s, many Jamaicans emigrated from the country following a destructive war and rising crime. Now the Jamaican diaspora are scattered across the world just like Dr. Kong. He migrated to the United States at the age of 15 where he remained until he retired and later returned to his roots in the Caribbean.

Dr. Kong speaks fondly of the rich culture in "Bad Boy from Jamaica: The Garnett Myrie Story" where his writing style resembles that of the legendary Mark Twain. After reading the complete works from Twain— all 100,000 pages— he wanted to paint a picture for readers to understand and appreciate Jamaican culture through written word.



Basil Waine Kong reveals the rich Caribbean culture in his new book, "Bad Boy from Jamaica: The Garnett Myrie Story," a profile of a Jamaican politician.
Courtesy Photo



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"Bad Boy from Jamaica: The Garnett Myrie Story" is available in on Amazon, Barnes & Noble and Xlibris online bookstores. For more information, visit: www.badboyfromjamaica.com.

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