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Congratulations!



Mr. and Mrs. Scott



Mayor Brandon Scott and Hana Pugh had an intimate wedding on August 11, 2024 at The Margaret Cleveland at Walther Gardens & Nursery near Lauraville, Maryland. The ceremony was performed by Circuit Court Judge Lynn Stewart Mays. (See article on page 9)

Photo: Alicia Wiley Photography

Lendistry Home Loans Opens in Maryland

By Demetrius Dillard

Lendistry SBLC, LLC has taken an important step in its quest to close the wealth gap.

On August 7, 2024 the company announced that Lendistry Home Loans has officially been set in motion in Maryland.

Lendistry Home Loans LLC offers conventional purchase and refinance loans with several options for non-traditional borrowers, including streamlined FHA loans and VA Interest Rate Reduction Refinance Loans.

For years, Lendistry has had a solid and expanding presence in the state with more than \$100 million deployed to small businesses in the region. With the launch of this new venture, Lendistry endeavors to assist underserved and undercapitalized communities access fair, flexible capital.

The announcement comes at a perfect time for prospective local homeowners looking for residential mortgage loans. According to research cited by Lendistry officials, home prices continue to rise across the state with fewer and fewer homes for sale.

Lendistry CEO Everett Sands is the founder and CEO of Lendistry Home Loans.

“It’s a challenging time in the housing market right now, so I see no better time to offer an alternative to home buyers who need a responsible, equitable lender who understands their communities,” Sands said.

“Together, Lendistry Home Loans and Lendistry will be a holistic capital source for underserved borrowers in the two most impactful pathways to closing the wealth gap: business ownership and home ownership.”

LHL, a financial technology company, has an application process that is fully online. Similar to Lendistry, human professionals are in place to support



Everett Sands, CEO of Lendistry SBLC, LLC, and founder of Lendistry Home Loans, LLC.

Photos: Lendistry



Kyle Funn, a Baltimore native, Lendistry's executive vice president and general counsel.

LHL applicants who need assistance.

“Lendistry Home Loans will offer the kind of technology-enabled, customer-centered experience that small business owners have enjoyed with Lendistry to first-time home buyers and borrowers looking to refinance or invest in property,” said Drew Collins, managing director of Lendistry Home Loans, who brings more than 30 years of experience at LoanDepot and Wells Fargo Home Mortgage.

“Across the board, we are here to help our customers succeed financially.”

Well aware of the “power of home ownership” for present and future generations, LHL has pledged its commitment to making the home loan process accessible, affordable and approachable for all clients.

Also licensed in California, Georgia, Illinois, Pennsylvania, and Texas, LHL draws on Lendistry’s experience in providing meaningful capital to underserved communities. In essence, Lendistry and LLC share the same core mission of providing economic opportunities and financial education.

Sands pointed out that small

businesses have benefitted from Lendistry’s approach and the fact that its team comes from the same communities as its clients. The company plans to bring the same approach to potential homeowners in Maryland.

“Maryland plays a special role in the hearts of the Lendistry’s leaders,” Sands said.

“Four of Lendistry’s executives have childhood roots in the state of Maryland. We will never forget what our communities did for us, whether it be our education or professional growth. This is another opportunity for us to give back and pay it forward.”

For two years, Lendistry has had an office in Baltimore and is housed in the same complex as MCB Real Estate, a commercial real estate investment firm. P. David Bramble, the co-founder of MCB Real Estate and son of Baltimore Times publisher Joy Bramble, is chairman of the board of Lendistry.

Kyle Funn is another Lendistry executive with local roots. He is the company’s executive vice president and general counsel.

“I have a deep, deep love for my city and all that it brings,” said Funn, a

graduate of Baltimore City College who grew up in sections of East and West Baltimore.

“It is a deeply rooted blue-collar town where the folks that live there are hard-working and committed to their communities.”

Funn has extensive background in law as a corporate attorney and in-house operator. He received a bachelor’s degree from Howard University and earned a law degree at Loyola Law School in Los Angeles.

Funn, now based in Los Angeles, lauded the establishment of LHL and emphasized its potential impact for local home buyers.

“Lendistry Home Loans is directionally continuing [Lendistry’s] lineage,” Funn said.

“What our hope is, specifically with respect to Baltimore, is that we can do much of the same in terms of impact that we are doing on the small business side – providing an innovative, technology-enabled mortgage product that is also intended to close the wealth gap.”

The most unique component of Lendistry Home Loans is its deep commitment to its mission, Sands continued. LHL will direct its focus on products, process and policy to help support affordability in home ownership, he said.

Business ownership and homeownership are two foundational components of establishing and building wealth. The two entities are also crucial to a community’s economic sustainability, which Sands took into consideration while establishing LHL.

“It didn’t make sense not to go for it,” Sands said of his decision to start LHL.

“And if you think about a community as an extension of the family, I see small business lending and home mortgage lending as two pillars of that community’s success.

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Together, these 10 HBCU students drive the summer internship of a lifetime with Black-owned newspapers



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A 5-Part Primer on Artificial Intelligence: Part Four – Ethical Considerations Concerning AI

By Karen Clay

Clay Technology and Multimedia, L.L.C.

Since the first recognized conference at Dartmouth University brought Artificial Intelligence (AI) to the forefront as a field, its potential to revolutionize sectors such as healthcare, finance, transportation, and even the creative arts, has been undeniable. As AI systems have become more commonplace, ethical concerns such as bias, privacy, transparency, copyright, and the broader societal impacts have taken center stage. It therefore is crucial to address these concerns to ensure that AI technologies are developed and used responsibly. Here are some of the key areas on which we should focus so that these concerns are mitigated.

Bias and Discrimination

One of the most pressing ethical concerns with AI is the potential for bias and discrimination. AI is trained on real-world data that people have given it, so if that data contains biases or is incomplete, the AI will likely replicate and/or amplify those biases. For example, a woman named Timnit Gebru, along with six other colleagues looked at the ways Large Language Models (LLMs), which were trained on material including sites like Wikipedia, Twitter, and Reddit, reflect bias that can reinforce societal prejudices.

In the paper, *On the Dangers of Stochastic Parrots: Can Language Models Be Too Big?*, they found that: *“The training data [was] shown to have problematic characteristics resulting in models that encode stereotypical and derogatory associations along gender, race, ethnicity, and disability status,”* and that *“White supremacist and misogynistic, ageist, etc., views are overrepresented in the training data, not*

only exceeding their prevalence in the general population but also setting up models trained on these datasets to further amplify biases and harms.”

Bias in AI also extends to areas like hiring and lending. Algorithms used to screen job applicants or assess creditworthiness can unintentionally favor certain demographics over others, perpetuating existing inequalities. It is important then that AI training requires not only careful data selection and processing but also ongoing monitoring to ensure that AI systems are fair and just in their decision-making processes.

Privacy Concerns

AI’s reliance on vast amounts of data also raises significant privacy concerns. These systems often require access to personal information to function effectively, whether it’s for personalized recommendations, targeted advertising, or health diagnostics. The collection and use of this data, however, can lead to privacy invasions, especially if the data is used without explicit consent or is vulnerable to breaches.

For instance, AI-powered surveillance systems can track individuals’ movements and behaviors, potentially leading to government or corporate overreach. The challenge lies in balancing the benefits of AI-driven data analysis with the need to protect individual privacy rights. Strong data protection regulations and transparent data practices are essential to mitigate these privacy risks.

Transparency and Explainability

Many AI models, particularly those based on deep learning, operate as



Ethical concerns regarding AI is a real struggle. Graphic Design by Karen Clay

“black boxes” where the decision-making process is not easily understood by humans. This opacity can be problematic, especially in high-stakes areas such as healthcare, criminal justice, and finance, where AI decisions can significantly impact people’s lives.

AI systems used to determine credit scores, or parole decisions can negatively affect the individuals who are seeking credit or who are eligible for parole, negatively impacting their lives. Therefore, ensuring transparency and explainability in AI systems is crucial to maintaining trust and accountability.

Job Displacement and Economic Impact

The impact of AI on employment is another major ethical issue. While AI has the potential to create new job opportunities, it also poses a threat to jobs that can be easily automated.

This potential for economic disruption raises questions about how society should manage the transition to an AI-driven economy. Retraining programs, education reform, and social safety nets may be necessary to help workers transition to new roles and mitigate the negative effects of job displacement.

Security Risks

Adversarial attacks, where malicious



Karen Clay
Clay Technology and Multimedia
Photo courtesy Karen Clay

actors manipulate input data to deceive AI models, can lead to dangerous outcomes. For example, manipulating data fed to an autonomous vehicle could cause it to make incorrect decisions, potentially leading to accidents.

Mitigating these security risks requires robust AI systems design, continuous monitoring, the establishment of ethical guidelines, and the development of AI models that are resilient to adversarial attacks.

While the potential uses of AI are promising, the ethical concerns surrounding AI are complex and multifaceted. We will continue to be challenged with the issues of bias, privacy, transparency, security, and societal impact. Policymakers, researchers, and industry leaders must continue to be vigilant and collaborate in creating frameworks and guidelines that protect individual rights while fostering innovation. By proactively addressing these ethical challenges, we can harness the full potential of AI while minimizing its risks.

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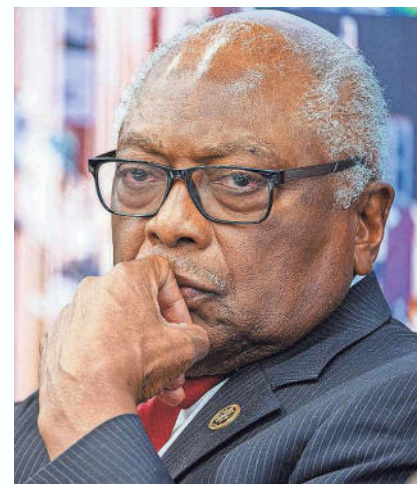
OP-ED

Project 2025: Jim Crow 2.0

By James E. Clyburn
U.S. Congressman (SC-06)

In two years, we will celebrate our nation's 250th birthday. Our great country has survived a Civil War, two world wars, a Cold War, and a plethora of legislative and judicial fits and starts in our pursuit of a "more perfect Union." We have endured some devastating Supreme Court decisions, *Dred Scott*, *The Slaughterhouse Cases*, and *Plessy v. Ferguson*, to name just a few. We have survived some oppressive presidencies, Andrew Johnson, Rutherford Hayes, and Woodrow Wilson, tantamount among them. Johnson attempted to nullify the impact of Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. Hayes ended Reconstruction. Wilson's policies towards federal civil service employment seem to be the foundation upon which a significant portion of Trump's 2025 Project is built.

But eliminating civil service jobs is not the only devastating and oppressive policy proposed by Trump's Project 2025. Project 2025 is a detailed plan to update the efforts of Johnson and Hayes to limit Black participation in our society, deny women freedoms over their own bodies, and deny association and nuptial rights to our LGBTQ+ community. Trump's Project 2025 is a radical agenda that would – among other things – eliminate the Department of Education, zero out federal funding to low-income schools, and end the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) Program. As Maya Angelou admonished, "When people tell who they are, believe them the first time." The PSLF Program became effective in the first year of Trump's Presidency and in his entire four years, only 7,000 public servants benefited from the program. In the three-and-one-half years of the Biden-Harris



James E. Clyburn
U.S. Congressman (SC-06)
Photo courtesy of NNPA

Administration, nearly 1 million teachers, firefighters, police officers, and other public servants have received over \$69 billion in student debt relief.

Trump's Project 2025 would also eliminate the requirements for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to collect racial data on employment, making it hard to determine where disparities and gaps persist. Further, the plan would end disparate impact liability, making it harder to bring a case of employment discrimination.

Trump's Project 2025 would remove diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) from all federal laws and regulations and shut down DEI offices across the federal government. Project 2025 would make it harder to organize or be represented by a union. In sum, coupled with recent Supreme Court decisions on presidential immunity, the weakening of the Voting Rights Act, and the elimination of affirmative action, Trump's Project 2025 represents less freedom for a growing majority of Americans and more favor for a privileged few. In short, Trump's

Project 2025 is Jim Crow 2.0.

Although Trump has repeatedly tried to distance himself from Project 2025, it is hard for him to do so when six of his former Cabinet secretaries, four individuals he nominated as ambassadors, his first deputy Chief of Staff, and 140 individuals who worked in his Administration all had a hand in crafting the document. And dozens more were contracted to advise on Project 2025, including his former Chief of Staff Mark Meadows and longtime advisor Stephen Miller.

I remember when my parents were able to cast their first effective vote. I remember segregated lunch counters and "separate but (un)equal" schools. I do not want my grandchildren to grow up in a country like the one my parents and grandparents experienced.

During the stormiest days of the Revolutionary War, Thomas Paine, an English immigrant and critic of slavery, wrote in his little Pamphlet, *The American Crisis No. 1*:

"These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and sunshine patriot will in this crisis shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands by it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph."

Thomas Paine's words are as apropos today as they were in 1776. Storm clouds are forming, and current conditions are not conducive for fair-weather friends. Trump's Project 2025 represents the reincarnation of "Jim Crow," and defeating "Jim Crow 2.0" requires the participation of "soldiers and patriots" who are willing to fight in stormy as well as sunny times.

Dr. Aubrey J. Grant Addresses Implicit Bias in Medicine Through Technology

By Andrea Blackstone

Subconscious feelings, stereotypes, and attitudes can impact healthcare delivery. What if there was a way to enter the shoes of individuals who experience implicit bias through use of an immersive virtual reality training experience?

That is exactly what Equity Commons helps to do. The company leverages innovative approaches, such as virtual reality and cutting-edge technology, while aiming to foster empathy among healthcare professionals. It helps them to understand and connect with patients from diverse backgrounds, according to Dr. Aubrey J. Grant, MD, FACC and Chief Equity Officer of Equity Commons.

“This not only improves the patient-provider relationship, but it also enhances the overall quality of care,” he added.

Whitney A. White, the Chief Executive Officer of the company, cofounded Equity Commons with Dr. Grant in 2018.

Dr. Grant, a Bowie, Maryland-based resident, also works as the Director of Sport & Performance Cardiology for Medstar Health. The sports cardiologist serves as a consultant to the Baltimore Ravens, Baltimore Orioles and Washington Capitals, and he supports local colleges.

“I have a practice in Baltimore at the Union Memorial Hospital and in Washington, D.C., where I treat not only high-level athletes, but also individuals who are passionate about exercise and maintaining their health,” said Dr. Grant.

However, he possesses a special



Dr. Aubrey J. Grant,
*sports cardiologist and Chief Equity
Officer of Equity Commons*

Photo courtesy of Dr. Aubrey J. Grant

interest in addressing health inequities and frequently works in underserved communities to ensure that quality cardiovascular care is accessible to all.

“Through my clinical practice, I aim to provide patient-centered, holistic care that is culturally aware and focused on improving the quality of life for my patients and the broader community,” Dr. Grant also said.

Dr. Grant further explained that he brings an empathetic, patient-centered approach to every interaction in his clinical practice.

“Throughout my medical career, I have witnessed the profound impact that genuine empathy and compassion can have on patients’ experiences and outcomes. This commitment to humanity is at the core of Equity Commons’ mission, where we strive to bring empathy back into medicine.”

With the assistance of a full team who works with the company, Equity Commons addresses implicit bias in medicine through comprehensive training programs. They are provided through innovative approaches, including virtual reality, to help healthcare professionals recognize and mitigate their biases. Services are utilized by healthcare institutions, medical professionals, and organizations that utilize corporate training to improve their approach to diversity and inclusion. A range of services are offered including empathy training, workshops, and consulting services to develop and implement equitable practices within healthcare settings.

“Clients use our training programs to gain a deeper understanding of their own biases and learn strategies to mitigate these biases in their professional practice. By incorporating evidence-based techniques and interactive sessions, we help medical professionals develop the skills necessary to provide more equitable care and improve patient outcomes,” said Dr. Grant.

He added, “Virtual reality and generative AI are among cutting-edge technology methods that are utilized to create immersive experiences that allow participants to explore and understand the impact of bias in real-world scenarios.

Both in-person and virtual services accommodate the diverse needs of Equity Commons’ clients. Flexibility ensures that high-quality training and consulting services are utilized, regardless of geographic location.

Dr. Grant’s interest in addressing implicit bias is rooted in his

professional journey. He earned his medical degree from Meharry Medical College in 2016, followed by an Internal Medicine Residency at Emory University. Dr. Grant completed a cardiology fellowship at Georgetown University. Dr. Grant attended Harvard University, where he completed the nation’s only Sports Cardiology Fellowship, to pursue additional specialization.

Dr. Grant stated that his experience at Emory University had a significant influence on the creation of Equity Commons.

“During my residency, I became acutely aware of the pervasive issues of implicit bias in medicine, and the impact these biases had on patient outcomes. This experience was a catalyst for my commitment to addressing health disparities and promoting equity in healthcare.”

Dr. Grant added that he lost his grandmother to her experiences with implicit bias in the healthcare system.

“Physician and patient bias often reflect the landscape of our society, creating mistrust. However, in health, trust is critical,” he also asserted.

Dr. Grant hopes to create a significant impact on the healthcare system by fostering a culture of empathy and understanding through Equity Commons.

“Our goal is to empower healthcare professionals with the knowledge and tools to recognize and address biases, ultimately leading to better patient care and outcomes. By promoting health equity, we strive to contribute to a more just and effective healthcare system for all,” said Dr. Grant.

Learn more about Equity Commons via <https://equity-commons.com>.

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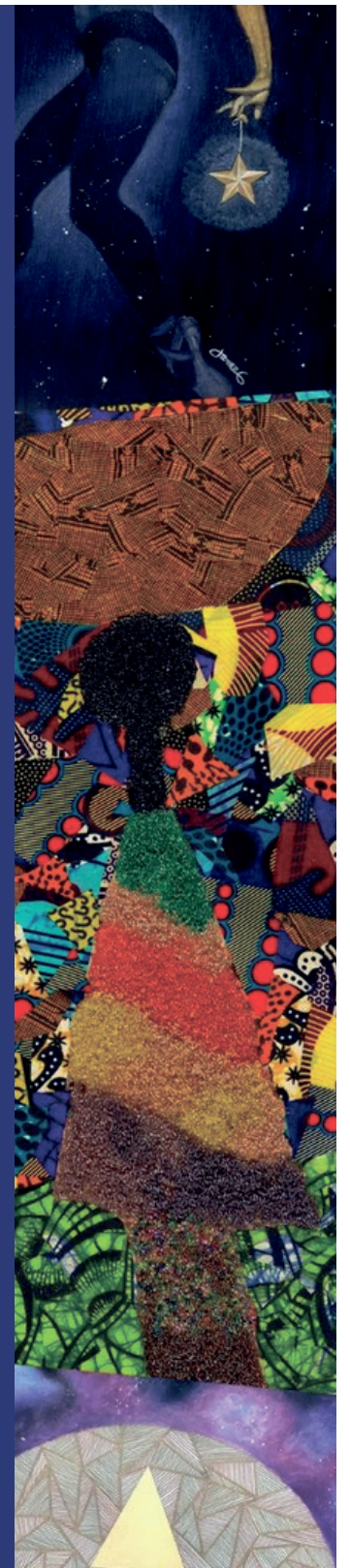
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Simple Weddings Without the Fuss Can Still Create Timeless Memories

By Andrea Blackstone

Some brides and grooms are choosing to focus on saying “I do,” rather than the pomp and circumstance of having a traditional wedding with the works. Micro weddings offer must-have elements of a wedding ceremony instead of the “dream wedding” approach.

“A micro wedding is considered any wedding with a guest list fewer than 50. Although micro weddings are small, I still recommend hiring a wedding planner to assist in planning the details and executing the timeline on wedding day!” said Jessica Jones, owner of Jessica Jones Events.

She explained that these small weddings have grown in popularity for budget conscious couples. Micro weddings are trending upwards for the 2025 season as couples are leaning toward a more intimate vibe for their special day.

Jones, who is Easton, Maryland-based, added, “From venue fees, decor and costs of catering, weddings in Maryland have become very expensive to host larger crowds.”

Small weddings can lend themselves to endless creative options. They can include meals at a restaurant in lieu of a reception; a destination wedding that only includes family and close friends; a courthouse ceremony followed by hosting a small dinner party at residence or back yard buffet; a ceremony in a park or at a beach; taking a farmhouse trip with people who are closest to the couple; or a customized combination that makes the day of nuptials unforgettable.

“Must-have services when keeping it simple is the officiant and preferably a wedding dress,” according to Terracia Brown-Wilkinson, owner of

The Venue at West Cobb, located in Georgia.

She also stated that reasonable options without a bridal party include the bride, groom and officiant. If a bridal party is included, two to four individuals can still be in the bridal party while the wedding stays true to simplicity. A large venue, large bridal party, and extensive decorations can be skipped.

Choosing the micro-wedding option does not mean that a couple cannot elect to have an unforgettable experience. Details such as the right flower selection and photographer can help implement an elegant affair.

Valerie Brooks, MSOL, visionary, founder and creative force behind Xpressions Floral & Event Design, has worked on Netflix’s “Love is Blind” Season 6. Beyond television, Brooks’ company is known for creating large installations for clients at their weddings, and also at retail installations. The company, which is based in between Charlotte, North Carolina and Baltimore, Maryland provides an artistic approach.

Brooks offered advice for people who prefer having a small wedding with flowers.

“I definitely would suggest investing in a focal piece, even if you don’t do big arrangements on all the tables... because your guests will enjoy that experience. Just that one larger piece will elevate the overall space. And after that, then you can just really fill in with candles and everything else,” she said.

She also suggested investing in pieces that can be used in the ceremony and the reception. Brooks recommends considering the type of flowers, whether artificial or fresh, will be used, depending on the budget.

“Obviously, if it’s a cheaper flower, then it’s going to look cheaper, and it also deals with execution. But if you talk to your florist, your florist can offer suggestions of other styles and other ideas that may fit your budget, versus going directly to silk [flowers], or even just switching out the flowers, because based on the variety of the flower, that affects the price. and sometimes the color also affects the price,” Brooks explained.

Simple weddings do not have to break the bank, but the bride and groom can still create precious memories that will last a lifetime.



Rose and hydrangea table display by Valerie Brooks, MSOL, CEO and Creative Director of Xpressions Floral & Event Design.

Photo: Cynthia N Delo Photography



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Mayor Brandon Scott and Hana Pugh Tie the Knot

By Andrea Blackstone

Mayor Brandon Scott and Hana Pugh had an intimate wedding at a surprise ceremony on August 11, 2024 at The Margaret Cleveland at Walther Gardens & Nursery near Lauraville, Maryland. Invited guests believed they were going to attend the couple's engagement party, however, they were in for a totally different experience.

"Our loved ones were in for a huge surprise when they showed up to Walther Gardens, a place Hana and I frequent with the boys, expecting to attend our engagement party not knowing it was our actual wedding!" Mayor Scott shared on Instagram.

According to Mayor Scott's Facebook post, the couple read personalized vows to each other, and they were intentional about incorporating Baltimore's flavor within their special day. Their menu included Maryland crab cakes, snowballs, and chicken boxes. They danced to Baltimore Club Music during their reception.

"We wanted a wedding without all of the pomp and circumstance and many of the usual wedding traditions. What we prioritized the most was celebrating our love while being surrounded by the people we love the most," said Mayor Scott.

Mayor Scott's big day is an example of a wedding that focuses on the must-have elements of a wedding ceremony that included a venue, florist, videographer, bar service, DJ, coordinator, seamstress, cake vendor, caterer, dress boutique, rental services, beauty services, and photography services.

Alicia Wiley, a photographer who runs Alicia Wiley Photography, captured memorable photographs of the couple.

Photos by Alicia Wiley Photography



"Every wedding is unique, as it should be, but I feel there is an intuitive approach to weddings that wedding photographers have, opposed to others who may have a different photography niche."

She added, "I think telling the story of every couple and wedding is important. I find great value in high quality photographs. They are printed, framed, and shared through generations for years to come."



Baltimoreans Among Acting Talent in Upcoming Play

By Andrea Blackstone

Everyone needs a hobby or outlet to release life's steam. Taking a break to decompress before returning to mandatory tasks fights stress.

Margaret P. Bean, a fifty-nine-year-old community leader, award-winning director/playwright who hails from Laurel, Maryland makes it possible to do both. She provides local people from diverse work backgrounds spanning from schoolteachers to security officers, with opportunities to act and nurture their passion and acting hobby. Bean simultaneously allows them to bring powerful messages to the masses along to play patrons who show up to observe a slice of life acted out onstage through her company, MPB Entertainment.

"I wrote my first stage play in December 2016, titled "The Game Changer." I had authored several books over the years, and after a podcast interview, I was asked "What's next?"

Bean blurted out the words, "a play."

The creative entrepreneur said that she loves observing her written words come to life with the help of actors.

Empowering messages of hope, love and forgiveness are some of the themes that are prevalent in Bean's plays. For example, "The Game Changer" addressed HIV awareness and healthcare.

"Treachery, Lies & Deception" is Bean's latest work that has toured several cities and states.

She added, "'Treachery, Lies & Deception's' message to the masses is dealing with mental health care awareness and domestic violence, topics we as a people do not like to talk about, but we all need help in some way. Nothing wrong with talking to a therapist and if you need to get medication then so be it but the key is to get help!"



Margaret P. Bean, the award-winning director/playwright who will bring "Treachery, Lies & Deception" to Baltimore on August 24, 2024.

Photo: J. Marcus Howard / Ethos Media Marketing

The contract specialist by day remarked that she loves the cast of her plays. Some of whom call her "Ma." Bean stated that she is blessed to meet exceptionally talented people from all over the world, but Bean also has a passion for giving local talent a chance to experience performing under lights and in front of audiences who want to take a theatrical outing.

Myesha Dione, who is new to acting, portrays "Shady Shanay Wells." The actress identified the character as the jealous and battered wife of Justin Wells in "Treachery, Lies & Deception." Dione remarked that Bean has said that she likes to give new actors opportunities to highlight their talents and get their feet wet in acting.

"She is quite supportive of actors in the Baltimore and Maryland area," said Dione.

Bean stated, "I work with a lot of new talent and... help them develop into better actors."

She added, "The most important



Otis Williams portrays "Reverend Love" in "Treachery, Lies & Deception."

Photo: Otis Williams

investment is time, encouraging words and believing in them and their skills to bring about a great character is the best investment I can give."

Bean further explained that four Baltimoreans, Christian Blake; Regina "GinaG" Summers; Otis Williams; and Myesha Dione are in the current show. Most of the actors hail from the DMV area.

Otis Williams, a Baltimore City, Maryland resident, portrays "Reverend Love" in "Treachery, Lies & Deception." He has been acting since the beginning of the pandemic in 2020. Williams stated that he enjoys the process of creating a character and telling their story. His acting start was purely accidental. Williams stated that he filled in for an actor who tested positive for COVID-19 the day before the last day of a local theater production that his daughter participated in. The actor acquired an appreciation for character development.

"The beauty in creating the character and getting in tune with becoming



Myesha Dione portrays "Shady Shanay Wells" in the play.

Photo: Margaret P. Bean

this new person from the inside out is like being on a rollercoaster at an amusement park to me. I also want my art to touch lives and change them for the better," Williams added.

Bean stays on the move. She has been hired to work on a few major projects and looks forward to retiring from touring and producing.

"Only God knows the future he has for me, so I wait for his purpose to manifest," Bean said.

Dione, a native Baltimorean, wants people to come see the play.

"People should support this play because it conveys a story about the human condition that everyone has either heard about, experienced or seen."

"Treachery, Lies & Deception" will be held on Saturday, August 24, 2024 located at La Familia Sound Stage, 836 Guilford Avenue, Baltimore, Maryland. Doors open at 6 p.m. Tickets can be purchased from www.mpbentertainment.com.

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Remain Vigilant: COVID-19 Surges Ahead of Back-to-School

By Andrea Blackstone

As the time draws near for students to end their summer vacation and return to school, COVID-19 cases have surged. Cold-like symptoms are still making rounds. It is wise to stay up to date about COVID-19 developments, prevention strategies, and upcoming vaccines.

The new COVID-19 FLiRT variants are dominant strains in the United States.

“This (FLiRT) is the term being used to describe a whole family of different variants—including KP.2, JN.1.7, and any other variants starting with KP or JN—that appear to have independently picked up the same set of mutations. This is called convergent evolution. They are all descendants of the JN.1 variant that has been dominant in the U.S. for the past several months,” Andy Pekosz, PhD, a professor in Molecular Microbiology and Immunology, explained in Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health’s report this May.

According to the CDC, COVID-19 data through August 3, 2024 indicated that 1.5% deaths occurred in that past week in the United States. Test positivity (the percentage of COVID-19 tests that were positive) in the past week of data reported to the CDC was 17.6%.

Jennifer A. Schneider, MS, RN, Director, Bureau of Disease Prevention and Management at the Anne Arundel County Department of Health, recently explained that FLiRT is a subvariant of Omicron. She also stated that FLiRT variants account for most of the COVID-19 infections in the recent rise of cases.

“We are seeing an increase in [COVID-19] cases and test positivity



**Jennifer A. Schneider,
MS, RN, Director, Bureau of
Disease Prevention and Management
at the Anne Arundel County
Department of Health**
*Photo: The Anne Arundel County
Department of Health*

in the County, in Maryland, and then throughout the United States,” Schneider also said.

As of August 13, 2024, Anne Arundel County’s hospitalization rate was 1.40 per 100,000, which continues to be low. However, there has been a sustained increase of emergency room and urgent care visits with a COVID-19 diagnosis.

“The numbers are higher than they were at this time last year, but this is in line with national trends,” said Schneider.

She added that they anticipate the numbers are a little higher since people are using rapid test kits.

Additionally, the Anne Arundel County Department of Health partners with Anne Arundel County’s Department of Public Works to

monitor all seven wastewater treatment plants for the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

“We have seen an increase of SARS-CoV-2 present in the county’s wastewater [including feces], so it’s detecting high levels of COVID. While we might not know the true number of cases, this wastewater data kind of provides us with an early indicator of what kind of spread is going on in the County.”

Specimens of Anne Arundel County residents are collected and sent to the CDC for testing.

Schneider noted factors which may provide an explanation why COVID-19 surged in the summer, outside of people traveling spending more time together.

“The first one would be because the virus is just continuing to evolve, and that’s why we have these upticks in cases. Also, the vaccination protection is waning and if somebody was infected with COVID, the immunity to infection lasts about three or so months.”

Schneider stated that COVID-19 vaccination will not provide 100 percent COVID-19 protection, but it still significantly lowers a person’s risk of severe illness, hospitalization, and death.

In late June, the CDC recommended getting updated 2024-2025 COVID-19 vaccines, and the updated 2024-2025 flu vaccines, to protect against severe COVID-19 and flu this fall and winter. The CDC further recommends that everyone ages six months and older receive an updated 2024-2025 COVID-19, whether they have ever previously been vaccinated with a COVID-19 vaccine or not. Updated COVID-19 vaccines will be available from Moderna, Novavax, and Pfizer later this year, according to the CDC.

“Our top recommendation for protecting yourself and your loved ones from respiratory illness is to get vaccinated,” said CDC Director, Mandy Cohen, M.D., M.P.H. “Make a plan now for you and your family to get both updated flu and COVID vaccines this fall, ahead of the respiratory virus season.”

The elderly and the immunocompromised remain particularly vulnerable to new variants, because of their weakened immune response, according to Schneider.

She affirmed that practicing good hygiene; taking steps for cleaner air when large groups gather, such as opening windows or using an air purifier; gathering outside during group events; and wearing masks remain routine COVID-19 prevention strategies.

“We also recommended that when people are sick, that they stay at home..., and that they seek health care promptly for any testing or treatment. Try to stay away from others if you do test positive,” Schneider said.

Visit www.aahealth.org and <https://www.aahealth.org/disease-prevention-and-management/viral-respiratory-illness> to obtain more health-related or COVID-19 information from Anne Arundel County Health Department. Maryland Department of Health COVID-19 data and resources are available via <https://health.maryland.gov/covid/Pages/Maryland-COVID-19-Data.aspx>. Track Baltimore City’s COVID-19 numbers by visiting <https://coronavirus.baltimorecity.gov>.

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CERTIFICATION OF PUBLICATION CITY OF BALTIMORE OFFICE OF BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS PUBLIC NOTICE

PROJECT NO. 1319 – Phase 2 STORMWATER HYDRAULIC MODEL DEVELOPMENT

The City of Baltimore Office of Boards and Commissions has been requested by the Department of Public Works, Office of Engineering and Construction, to advertise for the services of three Civil Engineering firms to provide engineering services to develop a City-wide Hydraulic and Hydrologic (H & H) and stormwater quality model for the City of Baltimore (The City) stormwater drainage system. This project will expand on an existing model already completed on 3 sub-watersheds.

The City intends to apply this fully integrate stormwater model to: characterize the performance of the public storm sewer system under multiple rainfall scenarios; simulate various types of potential flood events to determine source, risk, and applicable corrective measures; evaluate the impacts of various stormwater management practices (structural, non-structural, and alternative), proposed development, and potential land use/land cover changes; assess the feasibility, effectiveness and potential impacts (trade-offs) of the City's ability to meet the waste load allocations (WLAs) for regulated stormwater for the Chesapeake Bay TMDL and other local TMDLs; identify and analyze options for replacing/ repairing storm sewers to support the asset management program; study the impact of street trees (leaf drop) and human behavior (litter / illegal dumping) on collection capacity; develop stormwater capital improvement program (CIP) projects and operations enhancements to mitigate flooding and improve the health of City's waterways; and evaluate resiliency and sustainability of the existing and proposed public stormwater assets with respect to conditions identified in the City's Disaster Preparedness and Planning Project (DP3).

The total area of the City's watershed remaining to be modeled is on the order of 68 square miles. Projects will be assigned on a sub-watershed basis. Each firm will follow DPW's model development standards which includes guidelines, nomen-

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clature, and protocols for data collection, model build, and data input to and from modeling and mapping tools.

The firms interested in providing these services must demonstrate and document:

1. Experience and expertise in applying a dynamic stormwater modeling software and methodologies that are applicable to urban drainage to meet project objectives.
2. Experience in gathering and reviewing various information sources and data sets needed for building stormwater quantity and quality model.
3. Experience in identifying data gaps and anomalies in the data sets and develop an optimized and cost-effective implementation plan to correct data issues.
4. Experience in using modeling handbook / standards developed by others to expand an existing model.
5. Experience in building integrated and dynamic model of the hydrologic and hydraulic components of stormwater drainage system, including but not limited to:
 - *Flow survey, boundary conditions, base flow components,
 - *Radar rainfall, historical rainfall, and rain gage data components,
 - *Rainfall-to-runoff component,
 - *One-dimensional (1D) sewer pipe flow component, and
 - *Two-dimensional (2D) digital terrain model (DTM) and overland flow components.
6. Expertise in stormwater model calibration and verification to industry standards.
7. Experience in building stormwater quality model that represents pollutant accumulation (build-up) and washoff mechanisms on subcatchments including temporal and spatial variations.
8. Expertise in stormwater drainage system characterization and an-

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alyze deficiencies based on discrete synthetic storms and multi-year continuous simulations model runs. Analysis to include but not limited to:

- *Hydraulic performance during the 2D overland flow and the 1D sewer pipe drainage systems,
 - *Interactions of the above-ground and the below-ground drainage systems,
 - *Hydraulic limitations in drainage pipes, inlets, culverts, as well as overland flooding areas, and
 - *Sensitivity and resiliency analyses of the impact of higher flood frequency events, storm surge or sea level rise.
9. Experience in developing comprehensive reports documenting:
 - *Data collection and gap analysis,
 - *The stormwater model development, calibration, and verifications, and
 - *Findings from system characterization and project recommendations.
 10. Expertise and capacity to provide storm drain inspection services to:
 - *Perform field surveys of the stormwater sewer system utilizing electronic and multi-sensor technologies including, but not limited to, visual, CCTV, sonar, and laser,
 - *Develop maintenance and rehabilitation plans.
 11. Ability to provide appropriate skilled personnel and resources to ensure effective performance and delivery.
 12. Experience in the coordination of a multi-disciplined team including Minority and Women Business Enterprises and demonstrated manpower availability to complete the project on schedule and within budget.
 13. Experience in developing knowledge management processes, City staff training and project data repository and visualization practices including Dashboard and GIS platforms.
- The City intends to select the services of three (3) firms for a period of two (2) years, with an option to extend for one (1) year additional term at City's discretion, for a

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fee not to exceed \$4,000,000.00 for each selected firm.

The Office of Engineering and Construction reserves the right to have a second interview with eligible consulting firms.

DPW encourages consulting firms that have the experience and capacity to work on this scope submit their proposals. All firms must demonstrate and document their capacity and resources to deliver the required services on time.

Should you have any questions regarding the scope of the project, please contact **Mr. Jemil Yesuf** at (410) 545-1809 or by e-mail at Jemil.yesuf@baltimorecity.gov.

All City of Baltimore Construction Projects comply with the standard 2006 edition of "The Specifications for Materials, Highways, Bridges, Utilities and Incidental Structures". City personnel will utilize these specifications for the Performance Evaluation of Design Consultants and Construction Contractors for this contract/project.

Each prime consultant submitting a proposal for this Project will be required to complete and submit an **original** Federal Standard Form 255, along with **five (5)** copies, to the Office of Boards and Commissions at 4 South Frederick Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21202.

The Federal Form 255 and the five copies must be submitted on or **before 12:00 P.M. (Noon) on October 4, 2024**. Submittals will not be accepted after this deadline.

Prequalification Requirement

All firms listed in the specific proposal for the Project must be prequalified by the Office of Boards and Commissions for each applicable discipline at time of submittal for this Project. Any construction contractor listed in the specific proposal for the Project to perform work in an existing prequalification category must also be prequalified. *A copy of the prime and sub consultant's current Prequalification Certificate should be included in the bid submittal package.*

Information regarding the prequalification process can be obtained by calling the Office of Boards and Commissions on 410.396.6883.

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Firms interested in submitting a proposal for this Project, shall address a "Letter of Interest" to the Office of Boards and Commissions, 4 South Frederick Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21202, (Email obc.consultants@baltimorecity.gov). Since these letters are utilized to assist small minority and women business enterprises in identifying potential teaming partners, the letter should be submitted within five (5) days of the date of the project's advertisement. The letter should contain a contact person. Failure to submit a "letter of Interest" will not disqualify a firm submitting a proposal for the project.

Insurance Requirements

The consultant selected for the award of this project shall provide professional liability, auto liability, and general liability and workers' compensation insurances as required by the City of Baltimore.

MBE/WBE Requirements

It is the policy of the City of Baltimore to promote equal business opportunity in the City's contracting process. Pursuant to Article 5, Subtitle 28 of Baltimore City Code (2000 Edition) – Minority and Women's Business Program, Minority Business Enterprise (MBE) and Women's Business Enterprise (WBE) participation goals apply to this contract.

The MBE goal is 30%
The WBE goal is 15%

Both the proposed Minority and Women's Business Enterprise firms must be named and identified as an MBE or WBE within Item 6 of the Standard Form (SF) 255 in the spaces provided for identifying outside key consultants/associates anticipated for utilization for this project.

Any submittals that do not include the proper MBE/WBE (in some instances DBE) participation will be disapproved for further consideration for this project.

Verifying Certification

Each firm submitting a SF 255 for consideration for a project is responsible for verifying that all MBEs and WBEs to be utilized on the project are certified by the Minority and Women's Business Opportunity Office (MWBOO) prior to submitting

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the proposal. A directory of certified MBEs and WBEs is available from MWBOO. Since changes to the directory occur daily, firms submitting SF 255s should call MWBOO at (410) 396-4355 to verify certification, expiration dates and services that the MBE or WBE is certified to provide.

Non-Affiliation

A firm submitting a proposal may not use an MBE or WBE to meet a contract goal if:

The firm has a financial interest in the MBE or WBE

The firm has an interest in the ownership or control of the MBE or WBE

The firm is significantly involved in the operation of the MBE or WBE (Article 5, Subtitle 28-41).

Local Hiring Law

Article 5, Subtitle 27 of the Baltimore City Code, as amended (the "Local Hiring Law") and its rules and regulations apply to contracts and agreements executed by the City on or after the Local Hiring Law's effective date of December 23, 2013 which is applicable to all vendors. The Local Hiring Law applies to every contract for more than \$300,000 made by the City, or on its behalf, with any person. It also applies to every agreement authorizing assistance valued at more than \$5,000,000 to a City-subsidized project. Please visit www.oed-works.com for detailed on the requirements of the law.

Additional Information

A firm submitting as a prime consultant that fails to comply with the requirements of Article 5, Subtitle 28 of Baltimore City Code when executing a contract is subject to the following penalties: suspension of a contract; withholding of funds; nullification of contract based on material breach; disqualification as a consultant from eligibility to provide services to the City for a period not to exceed 2 years; and payment for damages incurred by the City.

A resume for each person listed as key personnel and/or specialist, including those from MBE and WBE must be shown on the page provided within the application.

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Please be advised that for the purpose of reviewing price proposals and invoices, the City of Baltimore defines a principal of a firm as follows:

A principal is any individual owning 5% or more of the outstanding stock of an entity, a partner of a partnership, a 5% or more shareholder of a sub-chapter 'S' Corporation, or an individual owner.

Out-of-State Corporations must identify their corporate resident agent within the application.

Firms will not be considered for a specific project if they apply as both a sub-consultant and prime consultant.

The applications for this Project (Form 255) cannot be supplemented with any additional information such as graphs, photographs, organization chart, etc. All such information should be incorporated into the appropriate pages. Applications should not be bound. Applications should imply be stapled in the upper left-hand corner. Cover sheets should not be included. Inclusion and/or submittal of additional material may result in the applicant being disqualified from consideration for this project.

Failure to follow directions of this advertisement or the application may cause disqualification of the submittal.

Deena Joyce, Executive Secretary
Office of Boards and Commissions

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CITY OF BALTIMORE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION PUBLIC NOTICE

In an effort to educate the community about the upcoming project, a community meeting will be held.

This project includes roadway base repairs, curb, gutter replacement, repair of storm drain inlet/pipe and Milling and paving

(TR 15306) Russell Street (295) Rehabilitation From Russell Street Viaduct to County Line PUBLIC MEETING

Tuesday, August 20, 2024
5:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Westport Boys and Girls Club of
Metropolitan Baltimore
2343 Norfolk Street Baltimore, Maryland
21230

If you have any questions, comments or need special accommodations please contact Sandra Matier, Office of Engagement by email at Sandra.Matier@baltimorecity.gov Or by leaving a voicemail at 443-271-7224. Accommodation requests should be received by Tuesday, August 13, 2024

Receive regular updates via Facebook, "X" formerly known as Twitter at [@BmoreCityDOT](https://www.facebook.com/BmoreCityDOT).

Corren Johnson, DIRECTOR
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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