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BCAC of Delta Sigma Theta, Inc. Partners with Local Organizations to Present *'Saving Lives CPR Training' on Feb. 8*



February brings American Heart Month, Black History Month and Go Red For Women. In recognition of these observances, BCAC of Delta Sigma Theta, Inc in collaboration with the American Heart Association, Bailey's Heart and Soul Foundation and LifeBridge Health and Fitness will present Saving Lives CPR Training. The training program will take place on Saturday, February 8, 2025 from 10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. at LifeBridge Health and Fitness located at 1836 Greene Tree Rd #1 in Pikesville, Maryland. Over the years, BCAC has been educating and empowering the community about the importance of heart health, and is shown here supporting the American Heart Association's Heart Walk. (See story on page 2)

Courtesy photo

BCAC of Delta Sigma Theta, Inc. Partners with Local Organizations to Present ‘Saving Lives CPR Training’ on Feb. 8

By Ursula V. Battle

The Physical and Mental Health Committee (PMH) of the Baltimore County Alumnae Chapter (BCAC) of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. (DST) in collaboration with the American Heart Association, Bailey’s Heart and Soul Foundation and LifeBridge Health and Fitness will present a “Saving Lives CPR Training” event.

The training program will take place on Saturday, February 8, 2025 from 10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. at LifeBridge Health and Fitness located at 1836 Greene Tree Rd #1 in Pikesville, Maryland. The event is being presented in recognition of Heart Month, a time to raise awareness about heart disease, the American Heart Association’s Go Red for Women Initiative, a national movement to end heart disease and stroke in women, and Black History Month, a month-long observance honoring the triumphs and struggles of African Americans throughout U.S. history.

Heart disease is the No. 1 killer of Americans and disproportionately affects the Black community. The American Heart Association notes that African Americans are at a greater risk for heart disease and stroke than any other racial group. Contributing factors include genetics, hypertension, obesity, and diabetes. Despite these risks, the American Heart Association also highlights that African Americans can improve their odds of preventing and beating these diseases by understanding the risks and taking simple steps to address them.

A study supported by the National Institutes of Health found significant race and sex-based disparities in the survival chances of individuals



BCAC organizes and participates in the Heart Walk and Go Red for Women programs in collaboration with their charitable partner, the American Heart Association and LifeBridge Health and Fitness. Courtesy photo

receiving bystander cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) for out-of-hospital cardiac arrests. The study revealed that Black adults and women were less likely to benefit from bystander CPR compared to white adults and men, regardless of income level or neighborhood diversity.

In addition, there are also disparities between men and women. According to a study released by the Resuscitation Science Symposium, men are more likely to receive bystander CPR in public locations compared to women. The study shared that women and men receive similar CPR assistance within the home; however, in public,

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BCAC organizes and hosts a Go Red for Women event at LifeBridge Health and Fitness. Courtesy photo

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A Wake-Up Call for My Digital Life: How Private is My Online Data?

By Karen Clay

Clay Technology and Multimedia, L.L.C.

Friday, January 31 is the last day of Data Privacy Week, an initiative by the National Cybersecurity Alliance to bring to our awareness how data produced by online programs may be stored and used. When we join a new social media platform, download an app, subscribe to a new resource, or open a new online account, we often are asked to provide some personal information as part of the setup process. We rarely consider how this information will be used, nor do we spend time reading the privacy policies associated with completing the activity.

Well, this personal information is very valuable for the businesses that provide the services we desire. Consider the following story told by our fictitious character, Sally:

It was a regular Monday morning, and I was catching up on my to-do list over coffee when I received a text: “Unlock exclusive discounts by completing your profile!” It was from an online shopping app I used often. I didn’t think twice before clicking the link and entering my information—name, birthday, and preferences for future offers.

I smiled at the thought of saving a few bucks on my next order, but by midweek, I started noticing strange things. Ads for products I’d never searched for began flooding my social media feeds. One app suggested connections based on people I’d only briefly interacted with offline. Then I got an email saying, “Your NetKicks account was just accessed from another country. Was this you?”

That’s when I paused and realized: I’d traded privacy for convenience. It was starting to cost me.

I spent that evening researching data privacy, reviewing my online habits, and uncovering just how much of my



Make a commitment to be mindful of data privacy. Graphic Design by Karen Clay

personal data I’d given away over the years. I knew I couldn’t undo all the mistakes I’d made, but I could change how I managed my data going forward. With help from my research, I learned to take the following steps:

Understand the Trade-Offs Between Privacy and Convenience

I’d been too quick to click “Accept” without considering what I was giving up. Many apps and websites offer convenience—personalized recommendations, saved logins, and tailored notifications—but they collect a lot of data to provide these perks.

I began asking myself: Is the convenience worth the privacy I’m giving up? If the answer wasn’t clear, I skipped it. I stopped letting apps track my location unnecessarily. My weather app didn’t need to know where I was every second. I switched to typing my city manually when I needed a forecast.

Adjust Privacy Settings to My Comfort Level

The next thing I tackled was my privacy settings across apps, websites, and my browser. I realized that default settings often favor data collection, but most platforms allow adjustments. I spent an hour combing through

settings and making changes that aligned with my comfort level for:

1. Apps: I limited permissions like location, microphone, and camera access. For social media, I restricted who could view my profile and posts.

2. Websites: I stopped “accepting all cookies” and instead chose only essential ones. Some websites still prompted me to enable more, but I got comfortable saying “no.”

It took some effort upfront, but I felt a growing sense of control.

Manage the Core 4 Tips for Online Accounts

My biggest weakness had always been managing my online accounts. I decided to simplify things by focusing on four key behaviors:

1. Passwords and Two-Factor Authentication (2FA): I stopped reusing passwords and invested in a password manager. It created unique, strong passwords for every account, that I no longer had to remember. I also enabled 2FA wherever it was offered. Now, even if someone got my password, they’d need a code from my phone to log in.

2. Turning on Automatic Updates: I set my devices, software, and browsers to automatically update if I could,

and made a commitment for others to install updates as soon as they are available.

3. Subscriptions: I reviewed all my subscriptions. I canceled the ones I didn’t use and updated payment methods for the ones I kept. I deleted old accounts I no longer needed. Each time I found one, I used tools like JustDelete.me to make the process easier.

4. Phishing Messages: I learned how to identify phishing messages by looking for tell-tale signs such as urgency and offers that are too good to be true.

Be Intentional About Data Sharing

I stopped giving away more information than necessary. For instance, when signing up for new accounts, I began asking myself: Does this company really need my birthday, phone number, or address? If it wasn’t required, I left it blank. I also started using an alias email for subscriptions and newsletters to reduce clutter in my primary inbox.

The Payoff

By the end of the week, my digital life felt lighter. Ads on my social media feeds became less invasive, my accounts were more secure, and I had a clearer understanding of how to manage my data responsibly.

The biggest lesson I learned during Data Privacy Week was that protecting my information isn’t about giving up convenience entirely—it’s about finding a balance. It’s about being proactive, intentional, and consistent with the little habits that add up to a big difference.

Now, every time an app or website asks for my data, I stop and think: What’s the trade-off? Because when it comes to privacy, it’s better to manage it deliberately than to lose control altogether.

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Through 'Prayer and Pen'

AFRO Publisher Shares Grandfather's Legacy of Faith in New Book

By Ursula V. Battle

"Oh Lord God, we know that we cannot do everything, but help us to do something."

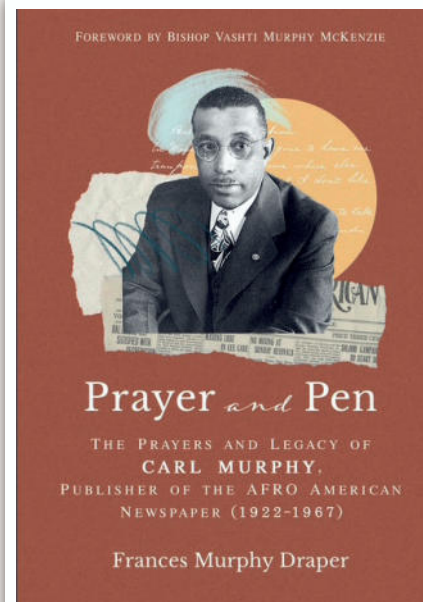
These are the words of the late Carl Murphy, Publisher of the AFRO-American Newspapers. Murphy's authentic conversations with God have been credited with helping him and many others to navigate the turbulent waters of Jim Crow, two World Wars, the Great Depression, the Civil Rights Movement, and other stormy times.

Murphy shared his fervent prayers with family, friends, the community, and the AFRO-American Newspapers. Through his strongly rooted faith in God, Murphy gave people hope and a desire to persevere - despite the seemingly impossible challenges they faced.

More than 100 of Murphy's original prayers, along with his many proverbs and words of wisdom were collected and compiled by his granddaughter Dr. Frances 'Toni' Murphy Draper. The collection is featured in her new book, "Prayer and Pen: The Prayers and Legacy of Carl Murphy, Publisher of the AFRO-American Newspapers (1922-1967)."

Walking in her grandfather's footsteps, Dr. Draper is the current Publisher of the AFRO, which has been in existence since August 13, 1892, when John Henry Murphy Sr., a former slave who gained freedom following the passage of the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, started the historic publication.

"My grandfather wrote about what was going on in the lives of Black people during that time and what was going on in family life," said



Prayer and Pen: The Prayers and Legacy of Carl Murphy, Publisher of the AFRO-American Newspapers (1922-1967) features many historic photos and a foreword written by Bishop Vashti Murphy McKenzie.
Courtesy photo

Dr. Draper. "He wrote about children, sometimes he wrote about holidays, he wrote about seasons, and many other things. This was something I wanted to do, and it took a while to compile everything, but this was a labor of love."

Released in time for Black History Month, "Prayer and Pen" is a weaving of personal reflections and prayers that eloquently illustrates Murphy's remarkable legacy as a family patriarch and businessman defined by the solace and strength found in consistent prayer.

"My grandfather wrote prayers every day," said Dr. Draper.

"Sometimes, they were just one line. We always sat down and ate meals together. He would say the



Dr. Frances 'Toni' Murphy Draper has compiled her grandfather Carl Murphy's original prayers, proverbs, and words of wisdom in her new book Prayer and Pen: The Prayers and Legacy of Carl Murphy, Publisher of the AFRO-American Newspapers (1922-1967). Courtesy photo

Dr. Draper. "He wrote about children, sometimes he wrote about holidays, he wrote about seasons, and many other things. This was something I wanted to do, and it took a while to compile everything, but this was a labor of love." Released in time for Black History Month, "Prayer and Pen" is a weaving of personal reflections and prayers that eloquently illustrates Murphy's remarkable legacy as a family patriarch and businessman defined by the solace and strength found in consistent prayer. "My grandfather wrote prayers every day," said Dr. Draper. "Sometimes, they were just one line. We always sat down and ate meals together. He would say the grace and he always prayed. He was a very spiritual man. He wrote a prayer for the March on Washington, and he wrote a prayer after the March on Washington. In this book, I pulled the AFRO's coverage from the March on Washington and provided a summary of how the paper approached covering the March and its significance."

Dr. Draper said she often recites her grandfather's prayers, and for years people have been suggesting his timeless and powerful words also be immortalized through a book.

"My grandfather's prayers are really profound," she said. "They are

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CIAA Basketball Tournament Returns to Baltimore on Feb. 25-March 1, 2025

By Demetrius Dillard

Officials from Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association joined city leaders, business partners and stakeholders to announce the highly anticipated return of the CIAA Basketball Tournament during a press conference on the morning of January 23, 2025, at the Baltimore World Trade Center.

CIAA Commissioner Jacqie McWilliams Parker, along with Mayor Brandon Scott, Visit Baltimore CEO Al Hutchinson and others, were beyond elated to tout the lineup of events, initiatives and activities featured in tournament week.

This year marks the fifth year that the CIAA Tournament will be held in Baltimore City, which holds profound significance in numerous ways.

The tournament usually falls on the last week of February, culminating Black History Month and serving as a precursor to the esteemed March Madness. Additionally, the CIAA, which is the nation's oldest and longest-running African-American athletic conference in the U.S., converges in one of the nation's prominent Black towns for an action-packed week.

Baltimore also stands uniquely with a storied, vibrant and rich sports culture that extends far beyond the Ravens and Orioles.

"As one of the country's top 10 cities with the highest percentage of Black residents and one that amplifies Black culture, Baltimore is the perfect destination for the CIAA Tournament," conference officials said.

Matisse Lee, Senior Associate Director of Athletics at Claflin University, shared opening remarks before giving way to Scott.

"We know how 'Black' and how electrifying the CIAA Tournament in



Terry Hasseltine, the Executive Director of the Maryland Sports Commission, speaks during the CIAA Basketball Tournament press conference on Jan. 23 in downtown Baltimore. Photos: JJ McQueen

Black Baltimore is," the mayor said.

"Baltimore, as you know, is bursting with culture, mouth-watering cuisine and the warm hospitality of our residents. We are eager, once again, to welcome our family members in the CIAA back to Baltimore."

CIAA Commissioner McWilliams thanked event sponsors, solicited support from community members and CIAA alumni, and highlighted the importance of the upcoming tournament and complementary initiatives.

"This is a memorable celebration," McWilliams said. "I love this city. I think it is truly the charm of everything — food, fun, people. I've never come here and not felt like it was home. I've never come here and felt like I shouldn't be here."

This year also marks the 50th Anniversary of the Women's Basketball Tournament, signifying a milestone moment that highlights the notable achievements, progress and ongoing success of the conference. This particular celebration will be the focal point of tournament week, paying tribute to the female student-athletes, coaches and



Leaders from the Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association joined city officials, business leaders and conference partners for the CIAA Basketball Tournament press conference on Jan. 23 in downtown Baltimore. From left: Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott; LaTonya King, Director of Talent Acquisition, Inclusion & Organizational Engagement at Food Lion; Clyde Doughty Jr., Vice President of Athletics & Recreation at Bowie State; Aminta Breaux, President of Bowie State University and CIAA Board Chair; CIAA Commissioner Jacqie McWilliams Parker; Elisa Milan, owner of The Empanada Lady in downtown Baltimore; Matisse Lee, Senior Associate Director of Athletics and SWA at Claflin University and Chair of the CIAA 50th Anniversary of the Women's Tournament Committee; Ashanti Turner, president of the Student Athletic Advisory Committee at Bowie State; and Al Hutchinson, President & CEO of Visit Baltimore.

influential figures who have contributed to the advancement of women's basketball.

"This year marks a monumental milestone for the CIAA and women's sports as we celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Women's Basketball Tournament and honor the trailblazing athletes who have shaped its legacy," McWilliams added.

"The Food Lion CIAA Men's & Women's Basketball Tournament is more than a competition, it is a testament to the hard work of our member institutions, the resilience of our student-athletes, and the vibrant culture of our

HBCUs and our community."

Lee also serves as the chair of the CIAA 50th Anniversary of the Women's Tournament Committee.

Carrying the moniker "#PaintingHerStory," a variety of initiatives will be featured throughout CIAA Tournament week, including the EmpowerHER Town Hall; Women's Empowerment Brunch presented by Nationwide; Ladies' Night on Championship Saturday; The Mind, Body, Soul Panel; and the John B. McClendon Jr. CIAA Hall of Fame

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CIAA

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Breakfast with a special focus on leaders in women's sports.

Along with the 22 games featured in this year's men's and women's tournament, the CIAA will offer fan-favorite events for all ages, including a free Fan Fest, High School Education Day, CIAA Career Expo, Super Saturday and The 10th Annual Samaritan's Feet "Shoes of Hope" initiative.

Once again, the CIAA will team up with Visit Baltimore to host a series of town halls and forums like the Tech Summit House, Money Moves Financial Summit and Health & Mental Wellness Forum.

In 2024, the tournament generated a total economic impact of \$32.5 million, supporting an estimated 1,315 part-time and full-time jobs while generating \$3.1 million in state and local taxes, according to the CIAA.



Bowie State University cheerleaders performed to welcome guests to the 2025 CIAA Basketball Tournament press conference at the Baltimore World Trade Center on Jan. 23. Photos: JJ McQueen

The tournament is slated for Feb. 25 to March 1, 2025 in downtown Baltimore's CFG Bank Arena.

The CIAA's 13 member institutions: Bowie State; Bluefield State; Claflin; Elizabeth City State; Fayetteville State; Johnson C. Smith; Lincoln; Livingstone; Saint Augustine's; Shaw; Virginia State; Virginia Union; and Winston-Salem State will meet in less than a month to

commence postseason action.

The week's festivities will officially kick off on Feb. 22 with a youth sports clinic at Middle Branch Fitness and Wellness Center in Cherry Hill.

"The CIAA Tournament is more than just basketball—it's a week-long celebration of Black excellence, HBCU pride, and community," said Al Hutchinson, President and CEO



From left: Bowie State President Aminta Breaux, Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott and CIAA Commissioner Jacqie McWilliams Parker pose for a photo following the CIAA Basketball Tournament press conference on Jan. 23

of Visit Baltimore. "We are thrilled to continue our partnership with the CIAA, bringing new and enhanced experiences for fans to enjoy. From the excitement of championship games to community events showcasing Baltimore's rich Black history and vibrant culture, we invite both visiting and local fans to take part in this unforgettable week."



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Best Day Spa	Zen and the City
Best Dental Practice	Shelton Family Dental
Best Fitness Class	Michele Blu Yoga
Best Massage	Serene Mobile Massages by Angel
Candles and Aromatherapy	the dede. shop
Best Air Conditioning/HVAC Service	Luhvac and Properties LLC
Best Hardware Store	Carey Hardware
Best Plumber	Sewer Slayer
Best Remodeler/Contractor	She Nailed It
Best Remodeler/Contractor	Taylor Made Custom Contracting Inc.
Best Barbershop	Reflection Eternal
Best Hair Salon	Diaspora Salon
Best Hair Stylist	Deana Stewart
Best Lash Tech / Lash Salon	Bombshell Bling & Beauty Boutique
Best Make-up Artist	Deana Stewart
Best Nail Salon	Luminous Nails and Spa
Best Skin Care Products	NKVSKIN
Best Cigar Shop	Fire and Smoke Cigar Parlor
Best Jewelry Store	Flourish Baltimore
Best Mens Clothing Store	SKRUED.Æ
Best Place to Buy a Unique Gift	Everyones Place
Best Pop-Up Market	Blkass Flea Mkt
Best Urban Retail	City Of Gods
Best Womens Boutique Shop	The Doll House Boutique
Best Womens Fashion Designer	Yele Stitches
Best Auto Body Repair	Baltimore Body Shop & Service
Best Auto Dealership	Exclusive Motorcars



2024 WINNERS LIST!

Best Art Gallery	The Black Genius Art Show
Best Author	Janella McRae - Every King and Queen
Best Dance Group/Ensemble	Fearless Dance Empire
Best Graphic Designer	Chardee Scott
Best Museum	The National Great Blacks In Wax Museum
Best Photographer	Jazzy Studios
Best Theatre Company	Arena Players Incorporated
Best Visual Artist	The Black Genius Art Show
Best Accounting Firm	A Little Faith Accounting & Tax Services LLC
Best Financial Services Banks & Credit	The Harbor Bank of Maryland
Best Black Radio Station	92Q
Best Event Planner	Global Flair Events
Best Event Space	Reginald Lewis Museum
Best Event Space	The garage
Best Live Performance Event	Jazzy Summer Nights
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Best Seafood Restaurant	The Urban Oyster
Best Specialty Non-Alcoholic Drinks	Mova Nature
Best Tea Barista	Cuples Tea House

Tax Season Tips for the Self-Employed, Social Security Recipients

By Andrea Blackstone

Taxes are due on Tuesday, April 15, 2025. Tenere Robertson, owner of T. Robertson & Associates, LLC provides personal and business tax preparation; accounting and payroll services; tax planning; and business formation services. The Towson, Maryland firm serves clients in Maryland, Virginia and the DC Area. T. Robertson & Associates, LLC also assists clients and nonprofits in all 50 states. Robertson answered three important questions about filing 2024 taxes.

Q: Is it a good idea to file even though your income is below the filing requirement?

A: If you worked a job and had federal and state taxes withheld from your wages in 2024, and you made less than the filing requirements of \$14,600, you should still file a tax return in 2025. At minimum you will get all the federal and state taxes withheld from your wages refunded to you. If you are between the ages of 25 to 65, you may qualify for earned income credit up to \$632 even if you do not have any dependents for tax year 2025. It's always a great idea to consult with a tax advisor to see what additional credits, if any, you may qualify for.

Q: What are some options for paying taxes for self-employed people who do not have taxes withheld?

A: If you are self-employed and have an income of more than \$400, you are required to file a tax return. You are considered a self-employed person if you carry on a trade or business as a sole proprietor, single member LLC, or an independent contractor for a profit. A self-employed person may or may not receive a 1099-NEC for

work performed, as a company is not required to issue a 1099 unless your wages were more than \$600. Whether you receive a 1099-NEC or not should not be a deciding factor as to whether you report your self-employed income. If you know you made money working as a contractor, no matter the amount, it should be reported. As a self-employed individual (sole proprietor or single member LLC) to report your earnings and expenses, you will attach a Schedule C to your personal tax return.

As a self-employed individual, not only are you the worker but normally you are the "HR Department" as well, which means you are responsible for making sure you are paying taxes on your earnings throughout the year. As a self-employed individual you pay two taxes on each dollar of net profit—15.3 % self-employment tax (which consists of the employers and employee's social security and Medicare payments) and your regular tax liability which ranges from 10-37%. The IRS recommends that you try and figure out your estimated earnings for the year, which you can do by using form 1040-ES.

If you find that you will owe more than \$1,000 for the year, then you must pay quarterly estimated tax payments. The first payment of the year is due April 15; the second payment is due June 15; the third payment, Sept 15; and the fourth and final payment is due January 15 of the following year.

For your convenience, you can mail form 1040-ES in, or you can choose to file electronically via the EFTPS system [The Electronic Federal Tax Payment System], direct pay, or by credit card over the phone or on the internet. To use the EFTPS system you must enroll online and wait for a pin to be mailed to you. By using one of the electronic

methods, you reduce your chance of error or lost payment, and you get confirmation right away to keep with your records.

Q: Tell me about 2024 tax rules on social security income.

A: Social security benefits can be 0%, 50% or 85% taxable. Social security benefits are typically not taxable if that is the only form of income the taxpayer receives. They will still receive an SSA-1099 but will not be required to file a tax return. To determine if a taxpayer's social security is taxable, we will compare a base amount (\$25,000 or \$32,000 married filing jointly) with the total of one-half of the benefits plus all other income to include tax-exempt interest. These amounts have not changed for 2024 and are exactly the same as 2023. There is a worksheet that is used to determine if the benefits are partially taxable and if that amount will be 50% or 85%. Taxpayers that are married filing jointly must combine their income and social security benefits to determine if any of their combined benefits are taxable.

Taxes are not one size fits all, so what works for your coworker, or your neighbors may not work for you. It is always best to consult with a tax advisor to discuss your unique tax situation. For every tax law there are several different outcomes based upon the filing status, income, and age of the taxpayer. Proper tax planning is essential if you really want to limit your tax liability, but you can't effectively do that if you only meet/speak with your accountant/tax advisor once a year. It is recommended that you meet with your accountant/tax advisor quarterly so that together you can come up with a plan for your unique tax situation as life changes happen.



Tenere Robertson, owner of T. Robertson & Associates, LLC provides tax preparation services.

Photo: Samuel Delay Jr.

Visit <https://www.facebook.com/1829TRA> to learn more about T. Robertson & Associates.

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Legacy

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still relevant today, because they're not time-bound."

Murphy, who was born in 1889 and passed away in 1967, served as Publisher and Chief Editor of the AFRO for 49 years. Under his leadership, the AFRO became one of the most widely circulated, most influential, and most financially successful African American Newspapers in the country. In addition to his professional work, Murphy was a civil rights activist, working with the likes of Charles Houston and Thurgood Marshall to desegregate public schools and

colleges. He earned a bachelor's degree from Howard University and a master's degree from Harvard University.

Dr. Draper served as Senior Pastor of Freedom Temple AME Zion Church for 20 years before retiring. A businesswoman and minister, she serves as the First Vice Chair of the National Newspaper Publishers Association as well as on several other boards.

Along with historic photos, "Prayer and Pen" also includes a foreword from another one of Murphy's granddaughters,

Bishop Vashti Murphy McKenzie, the first woman bishop in the AME church and now President/General Secretary of the National Council of Churches.

"The book has been well-received," said Dr. Draper. "My hope is that the book will inspire readers to preserve their own family traditions and history, while emphasizing the resilience and strength of past generations. Given the current state of things, people need to be reminded that the same God who brought us through back then, is the same God that will bring us through today,

and the same God that will bring us through tomorrow."

"Prayer and Pen: The Prayers and Legacy of Carl Murphy, Publisher of the AFRO-American Newspapers (1922-1967)" is published by Our Daily Bread Publishing. The book sells for \$19.99 and is available in hardcover and Kindle formats on Amazon and Christian bookstores. The book can also be purchased online at <https://ourdailybreadpublishing.org/prayer-and-pen.html>.

The image is a composite graphic. On the left, a portrait of Frances 'Toni' Draper is shown against a blue sky background. To her right, the text reads: "Frances 'Toni' Draper BOOK SIGNING February 16, 2025 1:00PM - 2:30PM Draper Fellowship Hall". On the right side, there is a book cover for "Prayer and Pen" featuring a portrait of Carl Murphy and the text "FOREWORD BY BISHOP VASHTI MURPHY MCKENZIE". Below the book cover is an Amazon product listing for "Prayer and Pen: The Prayers and Legacy of Carl Murphy, Publisher of the AFRO-American Newspapers (1922-1967)". The listing includes the price "\$19.99", a "FREE delivery January 18 - 22 for Prime members" badge, and an "Add to cart" button. At the bottom of the Amazon listing, there are social media icons for Amazon, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. The location "2926 HOLLINS FERRY RD. BALTIMORE, MARYLAND +1 410-636-4747" is listed at the bottom left.

Mentors Matter: Morgan Alumna Leads PrettyGirl Academy

By Andrea Blackstone

Mentoring matters, especially in the developmental stages of a young person's life. According to mentoring.org, 74 percent of those who had a meaningful mentor in their youth say that that person contributed significantly to their success later in life.

Erika Johnson, founder and executive director of Annapolis, Maryland-based PrettyGirl Academy, Inc. (PGA) invests in mentoring girls in their formative years. Johnson's own beginning of being surrounded by a loving family who pushed excellence is intertwined in the work she does today running a community-based organization.

"My dad, Rev. Richard Johnson III, and my mother, Dr. Karen V. Johnson, started a church when I was three years old," said Johnson.

She spent substantial time with the late Frances Brown, her grandmother and a former elementary school teacher. However, a life-changing event occurred.

"My father passed when I was 12 years old and that is what sparked the creation of PrettyGirl. As a 12-year-old with no dad to reaffirm me, I struggled with depression and anxiety not knowing what it was," Erika candidly shared that her mother was attentive to her children.

Johnson earned a Bachelor of Arts in Fine Arts from Morgan State University in Baltimore and credits people in South County and Prince George's County for participating in rearing her. She founded PGA in 2015. It empowers; promotes education; accountability; responsibility; encourages girls to learn to embrace their uniqueness; and fosters resilience amongst "sisters" in the mentoring program. Seventeen volunteer women mentors lend a hand.

"The ages we mentor are 11-17 years old," Johnson noted.

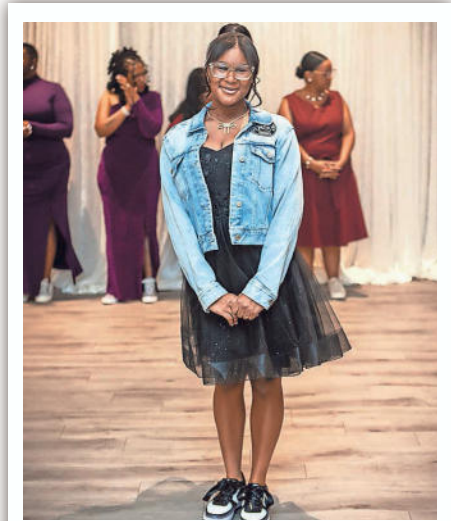
PGA's main program is held one Saturday monthly from October to June. Programming has been held at Meade



De'Aubrie Sheppard (left) and mother Vanessa Cain (right) attending PrettyGirl Academy, Inc.'s Sneaker Ball.



Princess Bradford (left) with Erika Johnson, founder and executive director of PrettyGirl Academy, Inc.



Kira Holmes enjoys PrettyGirl Academy, Inc.'s Sneaker Ball on November 16, 2024.

Photos: Erick Sellman

Middle School and Walter E. Mills-Parole Elementary School during the week.

The mentor added, "We teach them [mentees] their history, but we also prepare them for a world that can be unfair. We help them understand prejudice and sexism and give them the tools to stand up for themselves."

Vanessa Renee Cain, a single, busy working parent residing in Millersville, Maryland, who raises 13-year-old Princess Bradford and 12-year-old De'Aubrie Sheppard found out about PGA while attending First Christian Community Church.

"I met Erika on a more personal level when my child (De'Aubrie Sheppard) lost her father, and she wouldn't eat or sleep very well for days. I remember taking my daughter to the altar and it was Erika who prayed over my child and dedicated her personal time to talk with De'Aubrie right after service without being asked to. It was then I learned about The Pretty Girl Academy," said Cain.

The mother pointed out that some children may not want to discuss certain matters with their parents. PGA mentors allow mentees to be transparent and confide in them.

De'Aubrie mentioned that PrettyGirl Academy has helped her to maintain her self-esteem and become more sociable around other teens. Princess added that being a PGA mentee aided her in working with unfamiliar people and being able to be comfortable in new environments.

"PrettyGirl Academy helped make me to feel like I always have someone to support me even if it's not close family members," Princess said.

Selina Holmes, a married, working Bowie, Maryland mother, also found out about PGA as a First Christian Community Church of Annapolis member. Her 14-year-old daughter, Kira Holmes joined PrettyGirl in the fall of 2021.

"In terms of focus areas, they have covered a wide range of topics from self-care to sisterhood and entrepreneurship to leadership," Selina said. "Kira has grown in numerous ways in her time with PrettyGirl. The change that stands out the most is her self-confidence. She has never been shy but, unsure of her reception or her own abilities, she was hesitant to try new things and meet new people. PrettyGirl provided a safe environment for her to be herself but

also affirmed her in a way that built her self-assuredness outside of the program as well, including athletics, academics and social interactions."

Kira's favorite subject is biology. She stated that PrettyGirl provides a place where she is not judged and she can ask for advice.

"PrettyGirl has helped me grow academically because they push me to do better in my classes. They have helped me make new friends and gain closer bonds. They have also helped me as a young leader by encouraging me to advocate for myself," Kira added.

The next PGA cohort will begin in January 2026. However, because many girls try to join the program, applications are already available for the new season. There are no set residency requirements for girls to participate as long as they can get to meetings. Girls must be in the sixth to tenth grade to join.

Visit <https://www.prettygirlacademy.org/mentee-application> to complete an application and www.prettygirlacademy.org to learn more about PGA.



LEGAL TIPS CANNABIS LEGALIZATION

This factsheet addresses common questions for those who may have a criminal record related to a cannabis charge. This is not legal advice. Please consult an attorney about your specific situation. To get free legal help visit: <http://www.mvlslaw.org/FREE-LEGAL-HELP>

01 WHAT'S LEGAL?

If you are 21+ years old you may now:

- Purchase cannabis from a licensed dispensary
- Possess up to 1.5 ounces of cannabis plant (bud/flower),
- 12g of concentrate (vape/cartridge/distillate), and products totaling up to 750 mg of THC
- Grow up to 2 cannabis plants on private property for personal consumption

02 WHAT'S STILL ILLEGAL?

- Purchasing and/or possessing cannabis if you are under the age of 21
- Consume cannabis in public
- Possessing over 2.5 ounces of flower, 20g of concentrate, or products totaling over 1250 of mg THC

03 WHAT'S EXPUNGEABLE?

- Guilty for possession of Cannabis under 2.5 oz
- Guilty for Possession of Cannabis over 2.5 oz and successfully completed your sentence
- Guilty of Possession with Intent to Distribute Cannabis, successful completion of sentence, and 3 years with no convictions
- Charged with but not convicted of any cannabis-related offense
- Partial expungement - if you were found guilty of cannabis possession AND another criminal charge, you may be able to expunge the cannabis charge
- Automatic expungement - If only convicted of cannabis possession, the courts must automatically expunge you charge by July 1st, 2024

04 HOW DO I EXPUNGE MY CRIMINAL RECORD?

You may be able to obtain free legal help by contacting:

- Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service at 410-557-6527, Monday through Thursday between 9 am and 12 pm, or by visiting mvlslaw.org. Income qualifications apply.

What else you should know:

- The Governor's cannabis pardon applies to most people convicted of cannabis possession. However, the pardon does not expunge your record. Anyone with a cannabis charge on their record should still file for expungement.
- The courts implemented automatic expungement of some cannabis convictions in July 2024. However, it is still recommended that you file for expungement to make sure your case is fully expunged.
- If you have criminal charges on your record other than cannabis, contact MVLS to see if anything else can be expunged. New laws went into effect October 2024, and you may be eligible for expungement even if you previously were not.

Visit <https://www.mdcourts.gov/legalhelp/expungement> to access expungement forms and instructions for filing

Visit <https://www.peoples-law.org/recreational-marijuana-cannabis-use-and-possession-maryland> to access expungement forms and instructions for filing

CPR

Continued from page 2

45 percent of men received assistance compared to 39 percent of women. In addition, men were 1.23 times more likely to receive bystander CPR in public, and their chance of survival was 23 percent higher compared to women.

“BCAC’s Physical and Mental Health Committee seeks to educate and facilitate healthy lifestyles for the physical, mental, and spiritual well-being of our members and community,” said Lisa Dagnatchew, President of the Baltimore County Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta, Inc.

“We are proud to present this event, which is an example of the many ways BCAC is carrying out this mission. We are encouraging everyone to take advantage of receiving this life-saving training. We never know when the time will come when we may need it.”

“Saving Lives CPR Training” is open to all individuals ages 18 and older, and will offer affordable, lifesaving training that includes the following: Hands Only Demonstration training and Full CPR Certification Training. Both trainings will be provided by certified instructors. At the conclusion of the training, all participants will earn a certificate of completion. Hands-Only Training is \$40 plus Eventbrite fees and Full CPR Certification is \$80 plus Eventbrite fees.

Bailey’s Heart and Soul Foundation is a non-profit organization dedicated to educating schools on how to respond in cardiac emergency events and to equip them with the necessary emergency equipment. The organization was founded in memory of Bailey Bernard Bullock, who succumbed to Sudden Cardiac Arrest after completing a 200-meter track and field event at his local high school in Bel Air, Maryland.

“Every heartbeat is a promise of life, one that can be shattered in an instant when help doesn’t Arrive,” said Patrice Bullock, the mother of Bailey Bullock and Founder of Bailey’s Heart and Soul Foundation. “At Bailey’s Heart and Soul Foundation, we’ve witnessed the profound loss and unfathomable pain that follows a silent heart. That’s why this Heart Awareness Month, we stand united, teaching CPR so that every second can become a second chance. Learn CPR, save a life, and help keep the rhythm of hope beating in our Baltimore community and in memory of Bailey Bullock.”

Check-in will begin at 9:30 a.m. Advanced registration required. Visit <https://tinyurl.com/bdh754kj> to register. For more information, contact Lisa Dagnatchew at (443) 358-7066 or president@bcacdeltas.org.



February is American Heart Month. Over the years the Baltimore County Alumnae Chapter (BCAC) of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc. has been educating and empowering the community about the importance of heart health. Courtesy photo

Ravens Address Regular Season Success, Postseason Failure

By Tyler Hamilton

The Baltimore Ravens have battled to a 70-25 record with Lamar Jackson under center over the last seven seasons. Baltimore is easily one of the best regular season teams over that time period. Jackson has led the Ravens to four AFC North division titles since taking over for veteran quarterback Joe Flacco during the 2018 season.

The regular season success hasn't transferred to the postseason. The Ravens have a 4-5 record in the playoffs over the last seven seasons.

Ravens general manager Eric DeCosta thought he added the kissing piece when he signed veteran running back Derrick Henry to balance out the offense. Henry delivered by rushing for over 1,900 yards and finishing first in the AFC. At one point, it seemed like the Ravens were destined to be playing in New Orleans for the Super Bowl. Unfortunately, they fell short in Buffalo against the Bills during the divisional round. This season was still a success.

"I'm very proud of the team this year. It was a successful season – I'm not going to sit up here and say it was not a successful season," DeCosta said. "It was in just about every way of looking at it, but I'm disappointed and [head coach] John [Harbaugh] is disappointed. We're all disappointed. Our team is disappointed. We had higher aspirations, and we didn't achieve those aspirations and goals, but I think it was a successful season."

Jackson will probably win his third MVP award when the winners are announced the night before the Super Bowl. It's a reward he holds near to his heart. But nothing would be better to



John Harbaugh

Photo courtesy of BaltimoreRavens.com/Shawn Hubbard

Jackson than winning it all.

The Bills loss hit Jackson hard because of his turnovers. But Jackson more than made up for those with a series of outstanding plays that led to points for the Ravens. He had them in position to tie the game, but things just didn't go right when tight end Mark Andrews was unable to haul in a pass from Jackson that would have been a successful two-point conversion. That loss will linger with Jackson during the offseason.

"I want Lamar to relax a little

bit and think back to what we accomplished as a team and what he accomplished individually," Ravens coach John Harbaugh said. "And from what I've seen with Lamar, he's just grown so much – even just over the last couple of years, in terms of his game as a player, as a leader [and] as a person."

The loss came without Pro Bowl wide receiver Zay Flowers in the lineup due to a knee injury. Flowers is the first wide receiver drafted and developed by the Ravens to make it to the Pro Bowl.

Losing him undoubtedly took a toll on the offense. They won't use it as an excuse.

Flowers, like Jackson, is a Florida native. The offseason will give them an opportunity to go back to their home state and workout in hopes of making a Super Bowl run next season. In the meantime, they'll have to watch as the Kansas City Chiefs and Philadelphia Eagles battle for the Lombardi trophy next week.

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