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Dear Black Girls Brunch Held for Black Excellence Media Tour



*Tamara Payne, an interdisciplinary artist, hosted a Dear Black Girl Brunch for Black media at the Creatively Black Tour. Pictured (l-r) are Creatively Black Baltimore artists Dr. Yemonja Smalls and Alma Roberts; Trish McClean, Chief Marketing Officer, Visit Baltimore; Roshae Hemmings, Detour Magazine; Johnae De Felicis, freelance travel writer for Condé Nast, Matador Network and Fodor's Travel; Brenda Medley, BET Media Group; Kimberly Wilson, ESSENCE; artist and brunch host, Tamara Payne; Tiffany Nunn, publicist with DCI; Jacqie McWilliams Parker, CIAA Commissioner; Simone Harvin, Travel Noire; Delaina Dixon, Ebony; and Tracey Johnson, Communications & Public Relations Manager, Visit Baltimore attend Dear Black Girl Brunch for Visit Baltimore Black Excellence Media FAM (Familiarization Tour) on Saturday, March 1, 2025 at the Light Street Pavilion located at Harborplace. (See article on page 8)
Photo Credit: Daron Carter*



National Geographic Explorer in Residence: Tara Roberts Pens Memoir About Underwater Archeology, Slave Ships

By Andrea Blackstone

Imagine diving with and telling stories about Black scuba divers as they searched for and helped document slave shipwrecks around the world. Tara Roberts, a National Geographic Explorer-in-Residence and author of "Written in the Waters: A Memoir of History, Home, and Belonging," was inspired to pursue the challenge after she spotted a photograph at the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture depicting the underwater archaeology group, Diving With a Purpose.

"I ended up on this tiny, tiny floor in the museum that I think most visitors skip because it's more of an archival floor, but there on that floor was a picture of a group of primarily Black women in wetsuits on a boat. I'd never seen Black women in wetsuits on a boat before. I didn't know we were in that world at all, and it really struck something inside of me," said Roberts, recalling her trip in 2016.

She enjoyed reading books about real-life quests and adventures in her childhood, but Roberts filed thoughts of adventure away, since most of the books' characters did not look like her.

During Roberts' museum excursion when she lived in D.C., she felt drawn to read about the women divers who have a mission to help search for and document shipwrecks around the world. Diving With a Purpose trains young people to become archaeology advocates. The organization has also trained divers, not all of whom are women, according to Roberts.

The curious museum visitor reached out to Diving With a Purpose.

"They eventually invited her to dive with them," Roberts explained.

The special journey required Roberts

to get scuba certified. She spent time with the divers and learned more about their work. Around 2017, she did not have a clear plan but ended up quitting her job because she wanted to travel with Diving With a Purpose around the world while they embarked upon missions.

"It just felt like something I needed to do," Roberts explained. "They were doing missions in Mozambique, in South Africa, in Senegal, Costa Rica, St. Croix, around the U.S. It's all these places and I just wanted to be a part of it all.

Roberts said she was willing to borrow money or work at a restaurant waiting tables if she had to do it to have the flexibility she needed to participate.

Although she had storytelling roots as a journalist, Roberts had been working for a nonprofit in D.C. in communications. She spent her early career years working as an editor for women and teen magazines such as *Essence* and *CosmoGirl*.

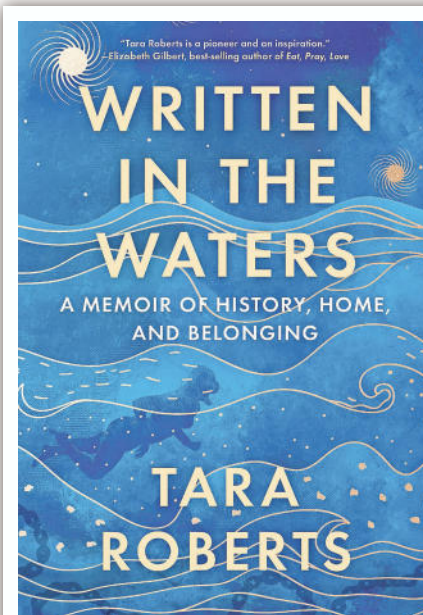
Roberts thought of a way to help tell the stories about documented shipwrecks and slave ships while she finetuned the details. She decided that she would share her adventures on social media, if no outlets picked up her idea for a writing assignment.

Roberts later discovered National Geographic's storytelling grants when she was seeking opportunities to finance her participation.

"I applied a couple of times with them [National Geographic], but the second time was when they gave me a grant and that's what started all of this," Roberts added.

Her small grant allowed her to travel and to write some blog stories about her travels.

"And even though it was a small



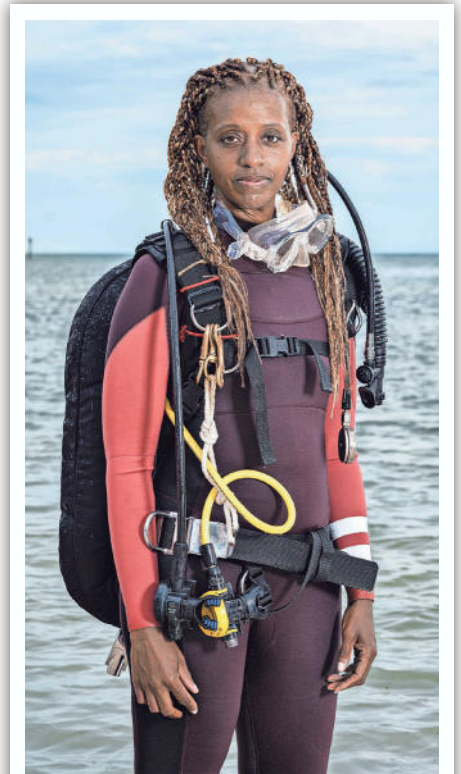
Courtesy of National Geographic

grant, I was like, 'I don't need much. I have plane tickets covered. I have backpacked before. I can make it on \$10 a day. I will be fine,' Roberts added.

A National Geographic-produced and funded podcast evolved. Now, Roberts has published a book in hand about her journey. The Atlanta-based author said her literary dive started because of her blog entries.

Roberts has been formally recognized for her contributions. She became the first Black female explorer ever to be featured on the cover of National Geographic magazine. Roberts was also named the Rolex National Geographic Explorer of the Year in 2022 and a Fellow at the MIT Open Documentary Lab in 2019.

"Written in the Waters: A Memoir of History, Home, and Belonging" was published this year by National Geographic. Roberts mentioned that 1.8 million enslaved Africans died on the Middle Passage coming from



Tara Roberts, National Geographic Explorer-in-Residence and author of "Written in the Waters: A Memoir of History, Home, and Belonging."

Courtesy of National Geographic

Africa, going to the Americas. Her book humanizes this history, honors the ancestors, and incorporates healing.

"It's looking for a way to know what happened in the past so that we can move through it to the other side," said Roberts.

Learn more about Roberts and her book tour dates by visiting <https://www.tararoberts.me>, and <https://www.tararoberts.me/written-in-the-waters> to discover more about her memoir.

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Maryland's New Tenant Protection Laws – A Big Win for Renters

By Courtland Merkel

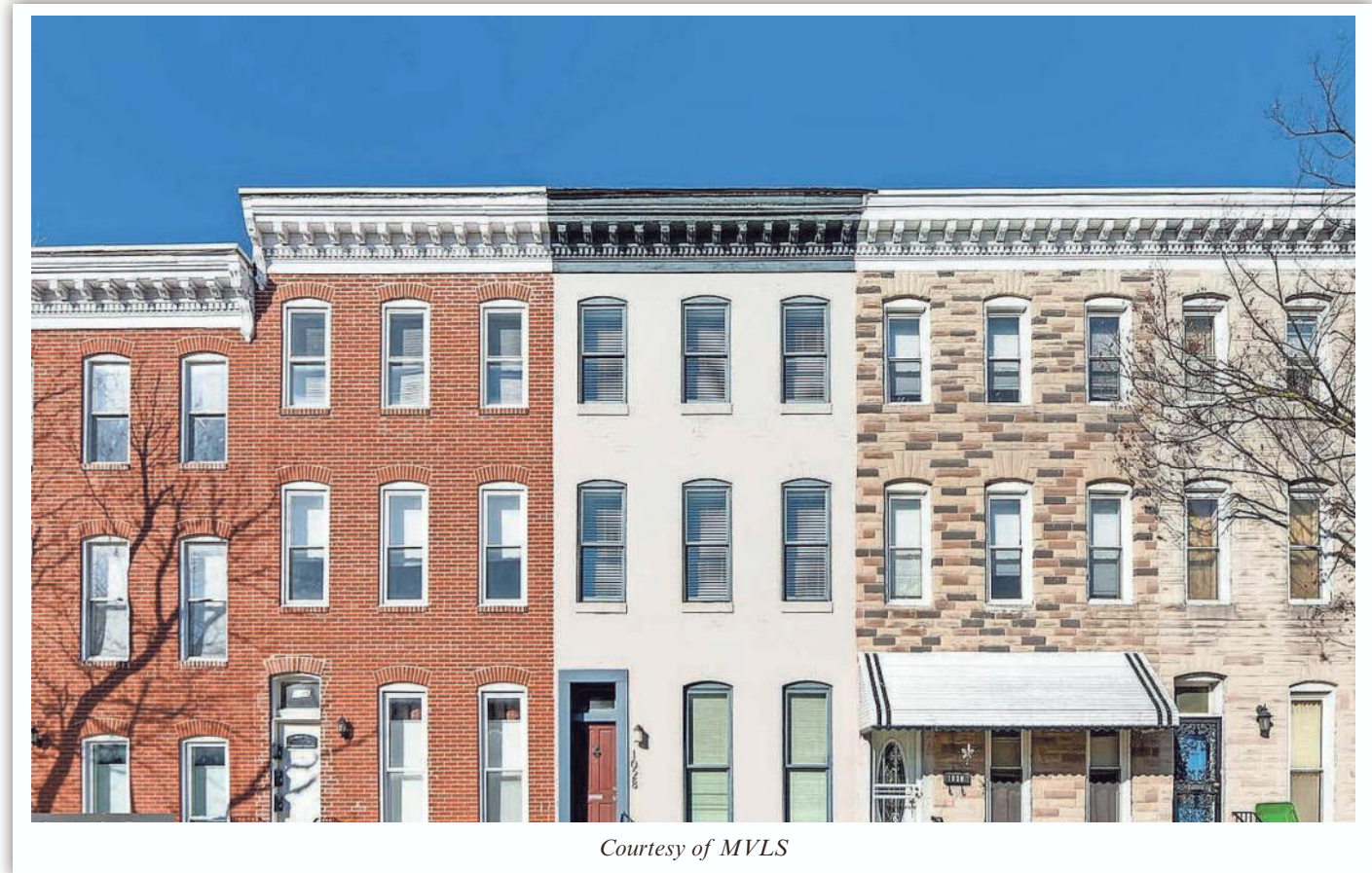
If you're a renter in Maryland, important laws are in place to protect your rights. The Renters' Rights and Stabilization Act (HB 693) brings stronger safeguards, leveling the playing field between tenants and landlords. These protections cover key areas like rental agreements, security deposits, evictions, rent complaints, tenant resources and more, all aimed at promoting fairness in housing practices.

Here's what you need to know:

- **Lower Security Deposits** – Landlords can now only charge one (not two) month's rent as a security deposit. Plus, landlords can't keep your deposit just because you broke the lease – unless they can prove actual damages to the unit or if the law specifically permits it.

- **Higher Eviction Filing Fees for Landlords** – Landlords are now required to pay higher fees to file nonpayment of rent cases. The fee jumped from \$8 to \$43 per case statewide, with an extra \$10 in Baltimore City. For civil eviction cases, the surcharge rose from \$18 to \$28 per case. Landlords can only pass these costs to tenants if the landlords win in court and the lease agreement allows it. Even then, the amount charged cannot exceed the tenant's security deposit.

- **More Time Before Eviction** – If a landlord wins an eviction case, they now must wait seven days instead of four before executing the eviction, giving tenants more time to vacate the premises and find alternate housing.



Courtesy of MVLS

- **Right of First Refusal** – If you rent in a small residential property of three or fewer units and your landlord decides to sell, you get the first chance to buy the property before it hits the market. Landlords must notify tenants in writing about this right. However, it does not apply to properties with four or more units, transfers to business entities, family transfers or certain other specified exceptions.

- **Stronger Rent Escrow Protections** – Rent escrow rules were updated. Tenants can now band together to take legal action against landlords who fail

to maintain safe, livable conditions. Tenants are entitled to a hearing for rent abatement requests and can seek rent reductions if the landlord failed to meet their obligations. Courts can also award legal fees and other relief to tenants, including the recovery of attorney's fees, costs and expenses.

- **New Tenant and Landlord Affairs Office** – Maryland established a new Office of Tenant and Landlord Affairs within the Department of Housing and Community Development. This dedicated office publishes an annual Maryland Tenants' Bill of Rights,

helping renters understand their legal protections, report violations, access financial counseling and address housing discrimination. Landlords must provide this document when tenants sign a lease.

These new laws are a major win for tenants across Maryland – giving you more rights, more protections and more resources to ensure fair treatment.

Stay informed, know your rights and don't hesitate to take action if your landlord isn't playing fair.

Courtland Merkel is a staff attorney at Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service.

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Local High School Students Can Apply Now for Maryland Forestry Foundation Summer Careers Camps

Annapolis, MD – High school students can apply now for the Maryland Forestry Foundation’s July 2025 Camps: Urban Forestry Careers Camp (UFCC) at the University of Maryland, College Park, and Natural Resources Careers Camp (NRCC) at Hickory Environmental Education Center in Garrett County, Maryland.

Both the UFCC and the NRCC camps are held in July. The UFCC will take place from Sunday, July 13 to Saturday, July 19, 2025. The NRCC will be held from Sunday, July 20 to Saturday, July 26. The camps offer high-school students the opportunity to explore career and college paths in either urban forestry or natural resources. Both camps limit attendance to ensure an immersive, hands-on learning experience for a small cohort peer group.

“I really enjoyed learning all the different college/career options there are under the canopy of forestry and environmental science as well as meeting new people...” writes a surveyed participant in the inaugural cohort Urban Forestry Career Camp 2024.

The Foundation fully pays for tuition for the UFCC through a grant from the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, however both camps require a \$150 activity fee. The NRCC tuition (\$500) is covered for students by their local Forestry Board. Covered expenses include housing; meals; field trips; recreational activities; field and classroom sessions lead by faculty and forest industry experts; educational materials; Career Night learning sessions; and much more. NRCC provides college credits for interested students and the UFCC planners are



Urban Forestry Careers Campers from July 2024 in front of University of Maryland Dorm. University of Maryland via Maryland Forestry Foundation

working also to provide credit in the coming years.

For more than 45 years, the NRCC has offered intense instruction on forestry, wildlife ecology, fisheries, arboriculture, watershed management, GIS and GPS technology mixed in with great fun and opportunities to interact with field professionals, educators, and like-minded students in a beautiful camp setting.

The UFCC kicks off its second year and offers students a week filled with fun, hands-on learning about the growing field of Urban Forestry with industry professionals and experts in many forestry-related fields. University of Maryland faculty and staff and outside professionals will lead sessions on how to conduct tree inventories, diagnose tree disease, determine the value and health of trees, and how to assess and reduce damage by deer and other wildlife in an urban environment. Students also learn about the value of urban tree canopy and environmental equity.

Applications, details and updates on both camps and the application process can be found at www.marylandforestryfoundation.org/programs/students-educators. Two Letters of Recommendation from a teacher, counselor, club adviser or another non-family adult are required with applications for both camps and can be submitted online.

For more information, please contact the Maryland Forestry Foundation at info@marylandforestryfoundation.org. The Foundation’s media contact is Patricia Foss-Bennie, at pfossbennie@outlook.com.

The Maryland Forestry Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization and a member of the Maryland Association of Forest Conservancy District Boards, serving as the fiscal agent for programs of the 24 local statewide Forestry Boards. To learn more, go to www.marylandforestryfoundation.org.

Part I of II

'Black Fairy Godmother' Provides Help to People in Need Across the Country, Raises Awareness About Autism

By **Andrea Blackstone**

March is Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month (DDAM) in the United States. It is a time dedicated to raising awareness about developmental disabilities, celebrating the achievements of individuals with these disabilities, and advocating for their rights and needs.

Simone Gordon touches lives in various spaces and places, including at home and in the community. Gordon knows what it is like to care for an autistic child and help others despite what she faces herself.

"My son (Jay) is the most loveable kid ever despite being nonverbal with severe autism," said Gordon, speaking about her 15-year-old son.

Gordon said that his diagnosis was made after he lost his ability to speak at two years old, but Jay flapped his hands instead. After Gordon's parents observed Jay, his mother took him to a pediatrician. She was informed that her son may have autism spectrum disorder.

The devoted mother shared that she must feed Jay and take care of his hygiene needs daily.

She added, "I am his voice to the world."

Gordon is accustomed to juggling work demands, Jay's therapy appointments, school meetings, and providing daily care routines for her only child. She mentioned various challenges parents of autistic children can face, including not having flexible work options.

"Many employers do not offer flexible schedules or remote work options, making it difficult to attend medical or therapy sessions," Gordon explained.

More obstacles that Gordon mentioned include:

Financial Strain

Extra costs for specialized care, therapy, and adaptive equipment can be significant. Many parents must fight for insurance coverage or financial assistance.

Emotional and Mental Health

The stress of advocating for services, being a single parent, dealing with school systems, and managing meltdowns or medical needs can take a toll on mental health, according to Gordon.

Limited Support System

Many parents feel isolated, especially if family members or friends don't fully understand their child's needs.

Navigating Resources and Services

Finding the right support, programs, and financial aid can be complex and time-consuming.

Despite Gordon's parenting journey that can become overwhelming at times, the advocate and mother has been changing the lives of many through her work as "The Black Fairy Godmother" for the last nine years. Gordon, a community organizer and social justice proponent, created a nonprofit to help Black and Brown marginalized families in need. The foundation uses the power of networking, social media and influence to connect families in need with people who can help.

"I earned the title "The Black Fairy Godmother" by assisting a Maryland family in 2017 that was on the verge of eviction and I was able to raise \$1,000

to stop the eviction the same day on social media. The woman (Teresa W.) gave me the title "The Black Fairy Godmother" because I was granting many mothers wishes on Facebook that needed emergency assistance with food, housing, domestic violence and education," said Gordon.

Gordon was inspired to start giving back to others in 2017 because four strangers decided to write to a children's hospital to request that Jay not be put on a waiting list, and to receive therapy and medical supplies. Additionally, a generous couple provided help for Gordon's college tuition to be paid so that she could return to school.

"I returned back to school and graduated college at age 35," she added.

The Black Fairy Godmother Foundation became a 501(c)(3) in December 2020. Gordon has transformed lives by using social media and community engagement to provide immediate aid and long-term support to those in need. For example, support is provided to women, families, and children in times of crisis by providing one-time grants of funds or goods. Online wish lists have been provided to help anonymous teenage mothers, veterans in need, seniors, and others. Rental assistance, car expenses, legal expenses, or evictions are excluded from support offered by the Black Fairy Godmother Foundation's areas of help.

Gordon keeps helping other people despite the hard work of raising money and finding fairy angel sponsors.

"I only sleep two to three hours a day with 30 volunteers to help manage the foundation and be a caregiver to my son. I feel as though I must



Simone Gordon, known as "The Black Fairy Godmother," is a recognized mother, community leader, activist, and philanthropist dedicated to uplifting marginalized women and families in crisis.

Photo: Erskine Isaac

do this work because so many state, local offices are not doing their job by serving people in need," said Gordon.

Individuals seeking help must fill out an application online and provide supporting documentation. Donations to help others are being accepted to enable Gordon to lend a hand to more people who have reached out to have their lives brightened by a fairy godmother.

Learn more about ways to support the Black Fairy Godmother Foundation by visiting <https://lnk.bio/theblackfairygodmotherofficial>. Read general information about the organization via www.theblackfairygodmother.org.



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Visit Baltimore FAMtastic Event Showcases Baltimore Artists

Dear Black Girls Brunch Held for Black Excellence Media Tour

By Ursula V. Battle

With the picturesque Inner Harbor as their backdrop, a powerful group of talented African American creatives recently assembled for a gathering worthy of its mural. The group of artists, journalists, and publicists participated in the Dear Black Girl Brunch hosted in the Creatively Black Baltimore Exhibition space. Visit Baltimore organized this Black Excellence Media FAM (Familiarization Tour) as part of the CIAA press trip.

The event took place on Saturday, March 1, 2025, at the Light Street Pavilion located at Harborplace. The group 'painted' the event with spirited dialogue that provided insight about their backgrounds and the inspiration behind their work. The event was hosted by artist Tamara Payne, with catering provided by Heirloom and Cuples Tea, both businesses located in the Light Street Pavilion.

Journalists and publicists included Brenda Medley (BET.com), Kimberly Wilson (Essence), Delaina Dixon (Ebony), Roshae Hemmings (Detour Magazine), Johnae De Felicis (Freelance Travel Writer for Fodor's Travel, Condé Nast Traveler, Matador Network), Simone Harvin (Travel Noire), publicists Tiffany Nunn of DCI and Catonya Lester of Lester PR and One/35 Agency, and Tracey Johnson and Trish McClean of Visit Baltimore. The event featured brunch and dialogue with Tamara Payne, artist, activist, educator, and creator of The Dear Black Girl Project, an installation of inspiring women images, voices, words, African textiles, and other objects.

The Media FAM included a tour of The Dear Black Girl Project and the Creatively Black Baltimore Pop-Art

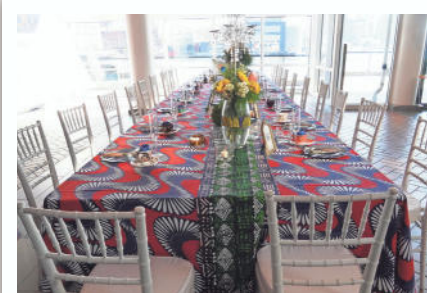
See **BLACK EXCELLENCE**, page 9



Artists from the Creatively Black Baltimore exhibition provided a show-and-tell of their work to Black media during the tour. Photo: Daron Carter



The Baltimore Times's founder, Joy Bramble, during the brunch. Photo: Ursula V. Battle



Dear Black Girl Brunch Tablescape Setting. Photo: Daron Carter



Delaina Dixon, from Ebony, poses next to the artist's rendition of Tupac Shakur by Graffiti artist Jon Brick. Photo: Ursula V. Battle

Black Excellence

Continued from page 8

Exhibition with a show and tell by participating artists. Creatively Black Baltimore is the largest regional exhibition of Black art, featuring more than 500 works by nearly 100 artists of color who live or work in Baltimore.

Several artists discussed their work during the tour and gave Bramble, Brown, and “Poncho” Brown high accolades regarding the day’s events and the groundbreaking exhibit.

“It is a great pleasure as a visual artist to have my work here at the Creatively Black Baltimore exhibit,” said community artist and educator Kenneth Clemons. “Today’s event is awesome and very monumental. It’s an appreciation and celebration because Black artists are often overlooked. Events like this are imperative because artists of all colors should be represented.”

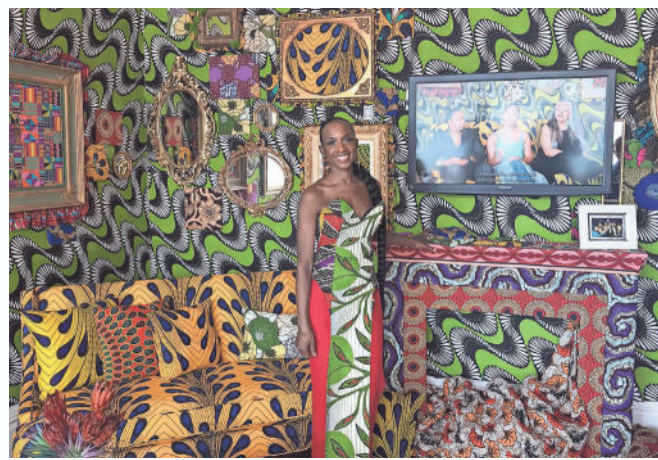
The exhibit seeks to showcase the extensive talent within Baltimore’s creative community and address the lack of support many artists have faced. Admission to the exhibition is free, and all works on view are for sale.

“This event and exhibit are awesome,” said artist Tiffany Harris, who has five pieces in the exhibit. “I’m always encouraged whenever I come and walk through this gallery. The show has been up for eight months now, but every time that I walk through, it’s a rejuvenation, and I’m ready to work my mind about getting into the studio again and just really experimenting and pushing the boundaries of my work.”

Four of Harry Livingston’s pieces are featured in the exhibit. Livingston said he has been creating art since childhood.

“Poncho did a great job with this exhibit,” said Livingston. “I think this is great because we never had anything like this for Black artists in Baltimore.”

For Creatively Black Baltimore hours and other information, visit <https://creativelyblackbaltimore.com/>.



Tamara Payne, interdisciplinary artist, activist, educator, and creator of The Dear Black Girl Project, pictured in her Dear Black Girl installation at Creatively Black Baltimore.
Photo: Ursula V. Battle



Artist Liz Miller wears one of her creations, an Afro Pick Braided Crown. She poses next to her larger-than-life Afro pick on display. Photo: Ursula V. Battle



Artist Hasani Claxton provides a show-and-tell of his work entitled “Our Lady of the Tempest” while the media looks on. Photo: Ursula V. Battle



(L-r): Artists Alma Roberts, Tiffany Harris, Donald Partlow, and exhibition co-founder and curator Larry “Poncho” Brown. Photo: Ursula V. Battle



Kenneth Clemons, community artist and educator, stands near his artwork. Photo: Ursula V. Battle

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Colorectal Surgeon Provides Information About Colorectal Cancer, Prevention Tips

By Andrea Blackstone

National Colon Cancer Awareness Month is an ideal time to point out that anyone with a colon can get colon cancer. According to Dr. Maseray S. Kamara, there are many factors including genetic and environmental that lead to colon cancer. The colon and rectal surgeon based in the Lorton, Virginia area specializes in robotic surgery and anorectal disease.

“There is a rising rate of colon cancer in adults younger than 50, and that is why we are recommending screening with a colonoscopy at the age of 45, rather than the age of 50,” said Dr. Kamara. “Men are more likely than women to develop colon cancer, but rates in women are on the rise as well. Black patients are more likely to develop, and unfortunately, die from colorectal cancer.”

Dr. Kamara further stated that individuals who are at high risk for colon cancer diagnosis are those with a family history of cancer, those with certain medical conditions such as inflammatory bowel disease, obesity, and diabetes. Since there is a genetic component to development of colon cancer, it is essential to know your family history.

Symptoms of colorectal cancer include changes in stool caliber or frequency.

“For example, someone having pencil thin stools or someone going from daily bowel movements to only one to two bowel movements a week. Blood in the stool: bright red blood, maroon-colored stools, or black stools should be brought up to your doctor and further evaluated, and unintentional weight loss,” according to Dr. Kamara.

Blood in the stool is a cause for alarm that should be taken seriously. The colorectal surgeon explained that she has seen some people dismiss the blood in their stool and blame hemorrhoids, but unless a medical evaluation and colonoscopy reveals that this is the reason, individuals should not assume that bright red blood, maroon-colored stools, or black stools are due to hemorrhoids. She added that in these cases, a medical provider should be consulted for further evaluation.

How is colon cancer evaluated?

“Colon cancer is evaluated by 1.) a physical exam – your doctor will do an exam of your abdomen and your rectum; 2.) by imaging— through CT or CAT scans of your chest, abdomen, and pelvis to evaluate the location and size of the cancer and ensure it has not spread, and 3.) with a colonoscopy to biopsy the cancer and evaluate the colon for any other lesions or abnormalities,” Dr. Kamara explained.

The good news is that colon cancer is curable if it is caught early and is at a low stage.

Dr. Kamara added, “This means the size and the spread of the cancer has not progressed as much. If the cancer is diagnosed at a later stage, meaning larger cancer that has spread to surrounding tissues, lymph nodes, or other organs it may not be curable, but depending on the level of spread, it can be put into remission.”

According to the American Cancer Society, the 5-year survival rate is 91% for localized colon cancer; 73% for regional; and 13% for distant. <https://www.cancer.org/cancer/types/colorectal-cancer/detection-diagnosis-staging/survival-rates.html>

Colorectal cancer treatment

can include chemotherapy, radiation, immunotherapy, surgery, and more, according to Dr. Kamara. A person should consult their doctor to get an appropriate treatment plan that may include one or more of these methods.

Dr. Kamara advised that the average risk person should get their colonoscopy at the age of 45. A colonoscopy looks for any masses or polyps. Masses are biopsied and polyps are removed. Depending on what is found on the colonoscopy, a follow-up schedule is determined. If precancerous polyps are found, an individual's next colonoscopy will be sooner than someone without polyps.

Prevention of colon cancer includes:

- 1.) Getting your screening colonoscopy at the appropriate age—45 years old of average risk.
- 2.) Watching for alarming symptoms such as blood in the stool, changes in your stool, and unintentional weight loss.
- 3.) Knowing your family history. If you have family members with colon cancer, you may need a colonoscopy before the age of 45.

Dr. Kamara confirmed that cardiovascular exercise and diet can reduce a person's colon cancer risk.

“Cardiovascular exercise can help reduce your risk of colon cancer by lowering inflammation and increasing your gut motility,” she said. “Red meat and processed meats are Grade 1 carcinogens. They cause inflammation and damage the colon



Dr. Maseray S. Kamara, a colorectal surgeon and board-certified general surgeon, is committed to demystifying colon, rectal, and anal health. Photo: Julie-Irene Nkodo

and are connected to the development of colon cancer. You should eat red and processed meat in moderation. On the other hand, a high fiber diet is protective. Fiber helps you have large bowel movements which clear the colon of toxins when you move your bowels,” she revealed.

Learn more about Dr. Kamara via www.kamaramd.com.

Presented by Moments with MO **Impartation Brunch Looking To Help Women S.O.A.R.**

By Ursula V. Battle

As a Hair Wellness Restoration Specialist, Minister Monika Willis always seeks to ensure her clients feel good about their outward appearance – especially when it comes to their hair. However, as a minister, she also seeks to ensure women feel good about themselves on the inside. Through an upcoming event, she is looking to help women ‘soar’ to new heights in their life.

In recognition of Women’s History Month, Minister Willis will present the S.O.A.R. (Sisters Organically Affirming Relationships) Impartation Brunch on Sunday, March 16, 2025 at the Blue Dolphin Seafood Grill in Gambrills, Maryland.

“March is a month that serves as a time to honor the achievements and contributions that women of all backgrounds have made throughout history,” said Minister Willis. “It’s a time to remember those who paved the way in our struggle for gender equality, and by recognizing the history-makers that broke barriers even to this day.”

She added, “My favorite trailblazer and leader in this dynamic is Harriet Tubman. She is my hero because not only did she fight for freedom, but she risked her own life to give the same freedom to others. We are also honoring Harriet Tubman during the event.”

Minister Willis is presenting the event through her brand Moments with MO. Apostle Jacqueline Simpson will host the event. Minister Willis, along with Shay Lewis-Sisco, and Evelyn Mason will be the guest speakers.

“To celebrate and commemorate the trailblazers in our lives, I felt compelled to put together a women’s



Event speaker Shay Lewis-Sisco; Apostle Jacqueline Simpson, host; Evelyn Mason, speaker; and Charlene Washington, coordinator. Courtesy photos

Impartation Brunch,” she said. “Some have asked why impartation and not empowerment? Empowerment is defined as the authority or power given to someone to take action. We’ve been given and have walked in empowerment for decades.”

She added, “Impartation has the power to accelerate your growth and lead the way for future generations. Impartation takes place through relationships. It also establishes a strong foundation to facilitate purpose and to unlock a brighter future.”

Minister Willis said she was inspired by a sermon to present the event, which will tackle a variety of issues. In addition to brunch, activities include icebreakers and acknowledgment of

influential women. Minister Willis said she overcame adversities and became an entrepreneur at the age of 20. She later became a celebrity hairstylist, mentor, and licensed minister, and she says she is excited to know that women will leave the event transformed.

“I’ve teamed up with some powerhouse women of all backgrounds and dynamics to not just empower, impart, or celebrate, but to bring back the power of community and unification through sisterhood,” she said. “To be sisters implies that there is an unbreakable bond between us. Sisters take care of each other, watch out for each other, comfort each other, and are there for each other through thick and thin.”



Minister Monika Willis will present S.O.A.R. (Sisters Organically Affirming Relationships) 2025 Impartation Brunch on Sunday, March 16, 2025 at the Blue Dolphin Seafood Grill in Gambrills, Maryland.

Minister Willis owns and operates Unique Salon Xperience in Glen Burnie and was raised in Annapolis, Maryland.

“Through this event, we seek to foster unity and strength among women, countering the negative influences that often divide us,” said Minister Willis. “Speakers will facilitate this event, aiming to create an atmosphere of power, purpose, and encouragement.”

She added, “We begin our journey of exploration on March 16, 2025 pouring into the women of our community with wisdom, knowledge, understanding, experience, love and power. This event will exemplify true sisterhood.”

To purchase tickets and for more information, visit S.O.A.R.

CIAA Men's Basketball Tournament Championship

Virginia State Defeats Bluefield State 71-64 to Win Men's CIAA title

By Demetrius Dillard

To conclude yet another CIAA Basketball Tournament, a hard-fought matchup between Bluefield State and Virginia State brought invigorating postseason excitement back to Charm City.

The leadership and guidance of VSU guard Jacob Cooper catapulted the Trojans back to CIAA prominence. The 5-foot-8 floor general made timely plays down the stretch, leading VSU with 16 points, eight assists and eight rebounds as the Trojans outlasted the Big Blue, 71-64, on Saturday evening at CFG Bank Arena.

The CIAA tournament crown is Virginia State's first since 2019. In only its second year with the conference, Bluefield State – an HBCU in West Virginia – fought its way to the CIAA championship match. On their way to the title game, the Big Blue might have pulled off the biggest upset of the tournament, knocking off Fayetteville State in the semifinal round, 71-65.

Jared White also showed up for the Trojans in crucial moments, recording 11 points and five boards off the bench. Davian Coleman and Jayson Harris pulled down 12 boards apiece, enabling VSU to outrebound BSU 52-38.

The title game matchup was a nail-biter as many probably expected it to be, but the Trojans managed to pull away at the end thanks to a series of clutch defensive plays that were converted on the offensive end.

One of the top teams in the conference, VSU is now 21-8 overall with the victory. Conversely, Bluefield State's season ends at 19-11 overall.

To begin the afternoon, the Big Blue shot relatively well from the field, connecting on 50 percent of their field goal attempts in the top of the first half. Early on, Jordan Hinds, Shainen Carter and Terrell Williams pioneered



Virginia State guard Jacob Cooper attempts a jump shot at CIAA men's basketball championship against Bluefield State on March 1, 2025. The 5-foot-8 junior was named the tournament MVP. Courtesy of The CIAA and Visit Baltimore

the Bluefield State offense.

With 8:34 remaining in the first half, Darius Boben's short jumper from six feet put the Big Blue ahead 23-18. VSU answered with a six-point run capped off by a Dajour Rucker breakaway layup.

Center Davian Coleman was pivotal on the glass, as was Rucker, enabling the Trojans to gain control toward the end of the first half.

Hinds pulled up for a deep 2 as the first half buzzer sounded as Bluefield State narrowly trailed 36-35 heading into the locker rooms.

The Trojans attacked the paint to maintain a close lead to maintain a slim advantage for most of the second half. For the most part, VSU guard Jacob Cooper facilitated the offense, finding big men down low for scoring opportunities.

But the Big Blue didn't lay down. Larry Howell, Williams and Hinds laced jumpers on consecutive possessions to help Bluefield State regain control toward the end of the contest. A putback tip by Carter stretched Bluefield State's lead to 60-55 at the 6:19 mark.

A fastbreak layup by Jared White off a feed from Cooper, and two wide open buckets from Jaedan Jefferson — one a high-flying dunk and another a layin — put VSU back on top, 62-61 before media timeout with 3:51 left in regulation.

Another Cooper assist — this time to Clint Wright Jr. on the right wing gave VSU a three-possession lead with 2:23 left, before a two-handed slam by Carter on the other end. At the two-minute mark, the Trojans were winning 69-64.

In the final minute and a half, interior defense helped the Trojans clinch the win. VSU defenders blocked multiple BSU attempts at the rim en route to the close victory.

Despite the loss, the Big Blue's offensive balance was advantageous for most of the evening. The Trojans completed a 12-point turnaround in the final six minutes of regulation, and the Big Blue were simply unable to respond.

Hinds, the CIAA Player of the Year, posted 12 points and seven rebounds. Williams scored 16 and added five assists, Howell netted 15 points and Carter poured in 14 points, eight boards and three blocks.

Next, Virginia State will await seeding for the Division II national tournament in the selection show scheduled for March 9.

CIAA Women's Basketball Tournament Championship

Fayetteville State Women's Hoops Repeats as CIAA Tournament Champs

By Demetrius Dillard

For the second consecutive year, the Fayetteville State University women's basketball team reached a significant postseason milestone, securing a conference title over a resilient Virginia State squad.

The Broncos exhibited confidence and togetherness, staying true to their team identity to reclaim the CIAA crown. Keayna McLaughlin and Talia Trotter scored 15 points a piece and combined for 14 rebounds to lead the Broncos to a 64-56 win over Virginia State at CFG Bank Arena on Saturday afternoon, officially culminating the 50th anniversary of the women's basketball tournament.

Fayetteville State University used an effective defensive strategy to limit their opponent's strengths. Intently focused on securing defensive stops, the Broncos felt their offensive rhythm would come naturally. And it did.

"Adversity brought us closer, we found ourselves and this isn't surprising to us," FSU Coach Tyreece Brown said after the win.

"All the seniors get to go out on top. We shoot for the national championship but this is a great thing with the 50th year, and for them to go back to back... I'm just proud of them first and foremost."

Senior forward Amesha Miller struggled early on but got going late. She finished the afternoon with a game-high 19 points and 10 boards. Mihjae Hayes chipped in with nine points and five assists.

The Trojans got off to a slow start in the first half but outscored the Broncos, 39-32, in the second half. VSU Coach Nadine Domond said she was pleased with her team's effort and felt they could have won if they had more time.

"We just ran out of time... if we just



The Fayetteville State women's basketball team has repeated as the CIAA women's basketball tournament champs after defeating Virginia State, 64-56, on Saturday, March 1, 2025.

would have had five more minutes," Domond said.

"I'm so proud of my young ladies – of what we've done, what we've been able to do, as a team. We just couldn't get it done."

Both teams shot an identical 21 of 58 from the field. Virginia State had six more turnovers than Fayetteville State, but tallied more rebounds and assists. The most notable statistical difference was FSU's opportunities at the free throw line.

The Broncos were 14-of-26 shooting from the charity stripe while the Trojans were 12 of 16. Additionally, FSU made eight 3-pointers to VSU's two.

To culminate a back-and-forth first quarter, Talia Trotter nailed a jumper to give the Broncos an 11-8 lead heading into the second.

The game saw a major momentum shift in the next 10 minutes, as FSU outscored VSU 21-9 to take control of the contest. At the break, the Broncos were ahead 32-17, fueled by Keayna McLaughlin's 11 first-half points.

"It's an honor to be here. Back to

back, a lot of people don't get to do that," McLaughlin said. "This is the first step to get to the nationals."

Using a sustainable defense and steady offensive attack, the Broncos maintained a double-digit advantage for most of the third.

Skylar White kissed a floater off the glass to bring the Trojans' deficit to within single digits as Virginia State appeared to generate some momentum toward the middle of the quarter before FSU responded with three quick buckets to extend its lead to 48-32 as the third drew to a close.

Entering the fourth, Fayetteville State led 51-39, leaving the Trojans with only 10 minutes to make a run at a shot of knocking off the defending champs.

Miller, Virginia State's primary offensive threat, was her team's go-to post presence late in the game. With five minutes left in regulation, VSU trailed 56-43.

McLaughlin's driving layup at the 3:00 mark put the Broncos back on top by 15. On the other end, Miller sank two free throws and Anii Harris



Fayetteville State women's basketball players are ecstatic after winning their second consecutive conference championship. Photos courtesy of The CIAA and Visit Baltimore

finished a short floater to bring VSU's deficit to 11 with about a minute and a half to go.

Racing against time, Virginia State was forced to foul as the Broncos moved the ball around, bleeding the clock to hold on for the win.

As the national tournament approaches, Fayetteville State awaits the NCAA Selection Show scheduled for March 9, 2025.



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Post Combine Wide Receivers that Should Be on the Ravens Radar

By Tyler Hamilton

The Baltimore Ravens have long had issues finding young wide receivers. Baltimore found recent success with 2023 first-round pick Zay Flowers. Flowers was selected to his first Pro Bowl, becoming the first wide receiver to be selected to a Pro Bowl as a wide receiver in the Ravens' franchise history. Prior to Flowers' selection, other Ravens receivers had been selected as return specialists.

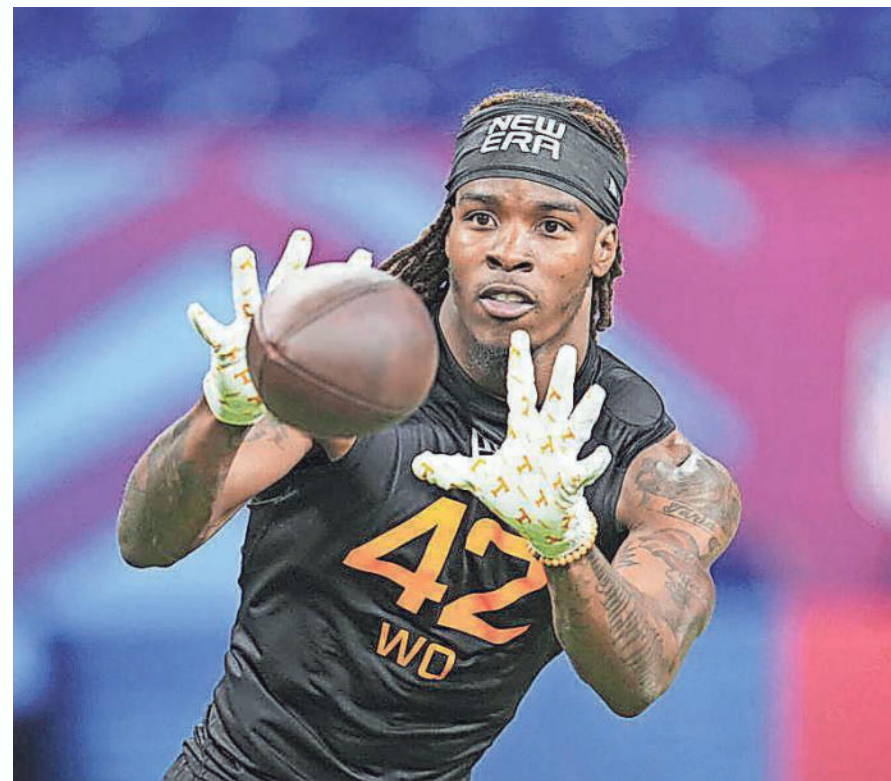
The Ravens also found success to a lesser degree with 2021 first-round pick Rashod Bateman. Bateman finished the 2024 regular season with career-highs in yards and touchdowns as he recorded 45 catches for 756 yards and nine touchdowns.

"I'm very happy to see the development that our young receivers have made the last couple of years. [Wide receivers coach] Greg Lewis does a great job coaching those guys up. Our players really did a good job this year," Ravens general manager Eric DeCosta said last week.

Now DeCosta must turn his sights to adding another pass catcher to help All-Pro quarterback Lamar Jackson deliver a third Super Bowl trophy to Baltimore. Lewis was at the Combine in Indianapolis last week scouring the available prospects.

"I think it's a pretty good class draft-wise," DeCosta said. "We feel like there is a good opportunity for us to find some good talent either through free agency or the Draft, in every round and every price point."

The first round might be a little rich for the wide receiver considering the other positions that need to be addressed. However, there are some outstanding options the Ravens may be able to snag on day 2 and day 3 of the draft that are coming off some really good performances at the Combine.



Dont'e Thornton

Photo: Michael Conroy/AP

Here are three receivers that would help the Ravens:

Dont'e Thornton | Tennessee | 6-foot-5, 205 pounds

Thornton, a Baltimore native (Mount Saint Joseph High School) blazed a 4.30 second time in the 40-yard dash. That alone created a buzz. His size and speed have drawn comparisons to Seattle Seahawks wide receiver DK Metcalf. Not bad company.

Jayden Higgins | Iowa State | 6-foot-4, 214 pounds

Higgins' overall performance impressed at the Combine. He ran a 4.47 second time in the 40-yard dash with a 1.53 10-yard split. Higgins showed explosiveness with a 39-inch

vertical and 10-foot-8 in the broad jump.

Jaylen Noel | Iowa State | 5-foot-10, 194 pounds

Iowa State has quietly become a good source for wide receivers. Noel joins Higgins as players with tremendous potential. They follow Xavier Hutchinson who went to the Houston Texans in the sixth round of the 2023 draft.

Noel is the most dynamic of the three and best at getting yards after the catch. His 4.39 second time in the 40-yard dash verified the big play ability he showed on film. Add in a 1.51 10-yard split, 41.5 inch vertical and 11-foot-2-inch broad jump and you get the makings of a super explosive player.

Legal Notice

**NOTICE OF SERVICE OF PROCESS
BY PUBLICATION AMENDED COMPLAINT FOR ABSOLUTE DIVORCE
GENERAL COURT OF JUSTICE DISTRICT COURT DIVISION**

**FILE: #24CYD040441-590
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
MECKLENBURG COUNTY
STACIE ABRAHAM-JOINES,
Plaintiff,**

**v.
SADE KENNEDY,
Defendant.**

Take notice that a pleading seeking relief against you has been filed in the above-entitled action. The nature of the relief being sought is as follows:

Plaintiff Stacie Abraham-Joines is seeking absolute divorce from Defendant Sade Kennedy.

You are required to make defense to such pleading not later than 40 days after February 1, 2025, 2024 and upon failure to do so the party seeking service against you will apply to the court for the relief sought. This the 31st of January 2025.

/s/ Shelby Hansen

Shelby Hansen

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