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StepAfrika! and BSO present world premiere: Nutcracker à la Ellington



Step into your holiday season with an evening at the Meyerhoff Symphony Hall between Friday, December 9 and Sunday, December 11, 2016. The Baltimore Symphony Orchestra (BSO) and Step Afrika! have collaborated to present the world premiere of *Swingin' Nutcracker à la Ellington*, an energetic holiday performance combining music, dance and a unique cultural twist on the traditional Nutcracker story. C. Brian Wilson is the, founder and executive director of Step Afrika!
(See article on page 12) Courtesy Photo

Running for gold and respect for Baltimore

By Stacy M. Brown

William Johns, 56, will put on for his beloved city at the World Masters Games next spring in Auckland, New Zealand.

The lifelong Charm City resident will compete in track and field games at the world's largest multi-sporting event. He hopes to bring home the gold. But more than anything, he wants to use this global platform to inspire the people in his own community and to share the true spirit of Baltimore with the world—a spirit of resilience. The same spirit that saw Johns through competitions at local and national levels of the Senior Olympics, a prerequisite for competing in the World Masters Games.

Johns will have the honor of carrying the Maryland flag during the opening ceremonies.

“I work seven days a week and you’ve got to live life despite so much negativity,” Johns said. “I’m proud to be from Baltimore and I’m doing this so that young people can see positive things.



William Johns
Courtesy Photo

There is all of this killing, all of this negativity that’s associated with being from Baltimore and I’m thinking that, with these games, I can make an im-

print; I can show something positive about Baltimore.”

The Games began in 1985 in Toronto, Canada and is held every four years. The goal of the event is to broaden the message of the original Olympics Games mantra, “sport for all,” by encouraging participation in sport across the lifespan. The philosophies of the Masters Games are to promote friendship and understanding, along with competition, between mature sports people regardless of age, gender, race, religion, or sport status. Anyone is welcome to participate, and participation is not limited to competition. Individuals and teams can sign up just for fun.

“I had read about the Senior Olympics as I was turning 51 and I decided to try out,” Johns said, who went on to win Silver in the 100 and 200-meter hurdles and Gold in the 400.

“I realized that you had to quality in the Senior Olympics in your state to go to the nationals and I started winning medals and meeting different people.”

Not only was Johns enjoying the competition, but he also looks forward to meeting new people and building new relationships through is participation in the game franchise. He participated in the USA Nationals in Minnesota earlier this year where he qualified for the World Masters Games.

“A lady saw me wearing black and gold and asked me if I was from Pittsburgh,” Johns said. “I told her that I’m from Baltimore where the Ravens play. I

had to let her know about the positives of Baltimore.”

At the World Masters Games, Johns will compete among 25,000 athletes from 100 countries, representing 28 sports and 45 disciplines.

Johns, a veteran automotive supervisor in the city’s General Services Department, began track and field as a high school student in the ‘70s. Years of dedication and grueling training led him to a state championship win and a No. 1 ranking.

In 1978, Johns’ running and hurdling abilities took him all the way to the Junior Olympics, where he captured a Silver Medal and became a contender for the Olympics in California. In 2011, he competed in the Maryland Senior Olympics, winning Silver and Gold.

He continued all the way to the 2013 National Senior Games in Cleveland, Ohio where his wins qualified him for the relay team that took second place.

A year later, Johns took the Silver medal in the Delaware Senior Olympics and in 2015, the Bronze at the National Senior Games in Minnesota.

He says his wife, Patrice Ross Johns; son, William Johns; and daughter, Tanaia Johnson, have been inspirations. His mother is the one person he hopes will make it out to next year’s race. He said for whatever reason, she’s never see him compete.

“But, I’m going to give it my all and do something positive for Baltimore. I’m planning to go to New Zealand and give them all a great show.”

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Guest Editorials/Commentary

Record number of African Americans will now serve in Congress

By Lauren Victoria Burke, NNPA Newswire Contributor

Reality star billionaire Donald Trump won the presidency in shocking fashion, but African American candidates also made history on November 8, 2016.

There will be a record number of African Americans in Congress during the time Trump is in the White House. That number will rise from 48 to 52. There have never been more African Americans elected to Congress in American history.

Kamala Harris of California will be the second African American woman to serve in the U.S. Senate. Former Maryland Lt. Governor Anthony Brown will serve in the U.S. House of Representatives. Both Republicans in the House, Mia Love (R-Utah) and Will Hurd (R-Texas) won re-election, as did the only Black Republican in the Senate, Tim Scott (R-S.C.).

Lisa Blunt Rochester was elected to the U.S. House in Delaware. Former Orlando Police Chief Val Demings will also serve in the House. Virginia State Senator Don McEachin was elected to the House in a newly configured seat in Virginia that covers Richmond.

Though there will be more African American members serving in Congress, the dilemma they find themselves in is obvious: All but three are Democrats who will be serving in the minority in the House and Senate. Being a member of the minority party in the House is one of the most powerless positions in Congress. It's the majority that sets the agenda, the hearing schedules, the floor schedule and when the Congress will be in recess.

The Senate is different. The two African American Democrats who will serve next year, Senator-elect Harris and Sen. Cory Booker (D-N.J.) could have some opportunities to influence the agenda moving forward. The Senate will be a narrower 52-48, and the rules allow for some disruption from members of the minority party.

However, it won't be easy. Currently members of the Democratic leadership in both the House and the Senate are in a period stunned silence and are not even harping on the fact that Hillary Clinton won more votes than Trump and therefore no Trump has no real mandate.

The Democratic Party in recent years has not been anywhere as militant as the rightwing, who created the so-called Tea Party movement and the "alt-right" to deal with the growing influence of African Americans and Latinos at the ballot box. Democrats in Congress are primed for a new set of younger leaders to take the place of those who are in their mid-70s and who have failed strategically to win over voters in a country where Democrats are in the majority.

That the Democrats had two candidates over the age of 68 running for the presidency as Republicans fielded a candidate in his mid-40s is a sign it's time for younger and more dynamic leadership on the left side of the aisle. One of those young leaders could come out of the Congressional Black Caucus, who is soon to elect a new caucus chair.

Lauren Victoria Burke is a political analyst who speaks on politics and African American leadership. She can be contacted at LBurke007@gmail.com and on Twitter at [@LVBurke](https://twitter.com/LVBurke).

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Community Affairs

Marylanders warned to beware of charity scams this holiday season

Annapolis— As the holidays approach, the Secretary of State, John Wobensmith is warning Maryland citizens to beware of deceptive practices. Charities in Maryland and beyond depend upon the generosity of citizens to provide programs and services to those in need across the state. While this is the time of year charities increase their efforts to collect donations, it is important to be vigilant about scams that are posing as legitimate charitable organizations.

“The holiday season inspires a spirit of generosity to help those in need, but unfortunately, scam artists are also stepping up their efforts to take advantage of that generosity,” said Secretary Wobensmith. “It is important for all Marylanders to be vigilant and know exactly to which charities they are donating.”

It is important to recognize the warning signs that may be affiliated with a scam. Ask questions and be wary of any charity that doesn't have answers. Here are some “red flags” that should help deter-

mine if a charity is worthy of support:

- Did the organization refuse to send you written material or financial information?
- Did the solicitor offer to send a person to collect your contribution?
- Did the charity send you an invoice or statement that indicates a payment due for a contribution you never pledged?
- Does the organization's name and logo closely resemble another charity with a similar purpose?

Charitable organizations soliciting donations from Maryland citizens are required to register with the Office of the Secretary of State if they collect \$25,000 or more in direct public support or use paid solicitors to raise funds for the organization. Additionally, smaller charities may be required to file a simple fundraising notice with the Office of the Secretary of State.

To check if a charity is registered, call toll free 1-800-825-4510. For more information about charities, visit: www.sos.state.md.us.

Maryland residents may also go directly to the charities database <http://sos.maryland.gov/Charity/Pages/SearchCharity.aspx>.

Despite progress, colorectal cancer claims thousands of black lives

By Dr. Patricia Maryland
NNPA Newswire Guest Columnist

Few diseases cause as much pain and suffering as cancer. While survivors, activists, policymakers and healthcare professionals have been successful in raising awareness for some types of cancer, others are not as high profile. Among them: colorectal cancer, the second leading cause of cancer-related deaths among men and women combined in the U.S. Even less widely known is the fact that African-Americans have the highest incidence and mortality rates for colorectal cancer.

The disparities are impossible to ignore. African-Americans are about 25 percent more likely than whites to be diagnosed with this form of cancer, and about 50 percent more likely to die from it. This is particularly troubling when considering that, in many cases, colorectal cancer can be prevented and is highly treatable, if it's detected early, according to the American Cancer Society.

While we're still working to understand why African-Americans are more

susceptible to this type of cancer, one of the causes of the disparity in mortality is that minorities lag behind in screening for colorectal cancer. Researchers at the University of Texas have shown that African-Americans are less likely than white patients to receive a colonoscopy—the most common form of colorectal cancer screening—even when controlling for health insurance coverage and access to quality healthcare providers.

Both patients and providers bear some

American patients to rule it out as a preventive measure. What's more, a lack of access to a physician they trust leads many members of the African-American community to delay this important procedure until it's too late.

In addition, healthcare providers sometimes contribute to the low colorectal cancer screening rates among African-Americans. A recommendation from a physician has been shown to increase the likelihood that a patient will get a

cancer is a critical factor in determining whether a physician should recommend a colonoscopy, when a patient's screening should start and concerns a doctor should address about the procedure.

Training healthcare professionals to understand the unique colorectal cancer risks of African-Americans, as well as the unease with which many view colonoscopies, is an important step toward increasing screening rates and catching more cases in their early stages. There is also a need for a broader conversation about increased risk and the need for prompt, diligent colorectal cancer screening in the African-American community.

This disease is expected to claim the lives of over 7,000 African-Americans this year alone. It's time to make sure the impact of colorectal cancer is just as widely known as that of other forms of cancer. And it's time to replace misperceptions and fear by embracing a culture of health that puts awareness and prevention first.

Fortunately, incidence and mortality rates for colorectal cancer have been on the decline among both African-Americans and other racial groups across the board, but substantial gaps in health outcomes remain. Healthcare providers and the African-American community must work together to ensure that all patients have and take advantage of the opportunity to access a colonoscopy or other screening procedure that could save their life.

Patricia A. Maryland, Dr.PH, is the President of Healthcare Operations and Chief Operating Officer of Ascension Healthcare, a division of Ascension.

“In the African-American community, the share of colorectal cancer cases that occur before the generally recommended screening age of 50 is almost twice as high as among whites. That’s why experts advise African-Americans to begin screening at age 45, five years earlier than other demographics.”

responsibility for the lower rates of colorectal cancer screening among African-Americans. On the patient side, African-Americans may not know that they are at a heightened risk of experiencing colorectal cancer earlier than other groups. In the African-American community, the share of colorectal cancer cases that occur before the generally recommended screening age of 50 is almost twice as high as among whites. That's why experts advise African-Americans to begin screening at age 45, five years earlier than other demographics.

However, encouraging early and proactive screening is complicated. The invasiveness of the procedure, coupled with fears of pain, often causes African-

colonoscopy, but according to the American College of Gastroenterology, African-Americans are roughly one-third less likely than whites to get such a recommendation.

These racial and ethnic disparities illustrate the need for a patient-centered, culturally competent approach to healthcare. As with many diseases, a broad range of factors determine a person's risk of developing colorectal cancer. Genetics, family history, personal medical history, diet, weight and physical activity all can have an impact.

That's why healthcare providers must treat each patient in a way that takes into account all of the influences on their health. This includes their race and ethnicity, which in the case of colorectal

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STEM program at BCCC positions students for success

By Bill Fleming

West Baltimore native and Baltimore Polytechnic Institute graduate Brittany Young struggled during her first year of college at the University of Maryland but that didn't keep her from participating in the science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) revolution and becoming a leader in her field.

Kirenia Sera-Viguera grew up in Cuba and had to learn English from scratch, but she tapped into math and science to garner one of the top 10 spots in her graduating class at Patterson High School, enroll as a STEM Scholar at Baltimore City Community College (BCCC) and become an accomplished student of architecture at Morgan State University.

Shalini Malaki earned her associate's degree in biotechnology at BCCC and a bachelor of science degree in medical and research technology at the University of Maryland Baltimore before attaining her master's in public policy from Georgetown University. She has conducted virology research in hopes of stopping a deadly form of typhoid fever in her native country of Nigeria.

Young, Sera-Viguera, and Malaki couldn't have hailed from more different circumstances or places. Yet, their unlikely paths would cross for a brief moment at BCCC's supercharged math and science cohort.

The three united again on Saturday, November 12, 2016 for BCCC's 4th annual STEM Community Day, a host venue for the second statewide Maryland STEM Festival. The three-hour event included a panel discussion on which they were invited to share their experiences and success.

So what's it like to be a woman in this very male-dominated field?

"People's expectations are we're not a good fit," Brittany said of her experience with being a woman in a male-dominated field. But to her, the terrain is not unfamiliar. "I had people telling me I couldn't do stuff since I was in first grade. If I let that discourage me, I would have dropped out of the University of Maryland."



(Left) Shalini Malaki earned her associate's degree in biotechnology at BCCC and a bachelor of science degree in medical and research technology at the University of Maryland Baltimore. (Right) Kirenia Sera-Viguera (left) enrolled as a STEM Scholar at BCCC and has become an accomplished student of architecture at Morgan State University and Brittany Young who struggled during her first year at the University of Maryland enrolled at BCCC and is now well on the road to success.

Photo Credit: Melvin Frooks/BCCC

The first year of college was tough for Brittany. She ended up with a 1.1 GPA at College Park. But she enrolled at BCCC and proceeded to do some amazing things: internships and job experiences at McCormick & Co., NASA and the Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory. She had the opportunity to conduct satellite and planetary research. In fact, she was the intern who discovered the Mickey Mouse feature on the planet Mercury.

The story was the subject of a Jeanne Moos TV report on CNN and made major media around the world. Today, she has come full circle, working to bring STEM concepts to the dirt bike culture in Baltimore for creative applications, video games and other resources local bikers might find interesting. She hopes her work will contribute to increase interest in pursuing STEM careers among young people West Baltimore.

"English was not my first language so that was a big challenge," Kirenia said. "But I got through that because my real interest was math and science. I think the biggest thing is time management. That's very important to my success."

Kirenia finds herself constantly

engaged by her study program at Morgan State to produce architectural models and recommendations using actual parcels of land slated for development. She even acquires old houses as investments with her father, the interiors of which she completely demos and remodels. She knows how to remediate lead paint in old houses and sometimes does this for charity. All in all, it has made for a busy life.

Shalini reflected how her science education and public policy degree might be regarded as vastly different undertakings, but it was all in the interest of public health.

"At first sight it might seem my degree in Biotechnology, a hard science and my degree in Public Policy, a social science are an unlikely pair," Shalini said. "However, the pressing needs of international development and global health require an understanding of biological events in order to help shape effective social and policy-related responses."

According to the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics, the estimated number of STEM jobs in the U.S. is expected to grow by 13 percent between 2012 and 2022, to nine million positions.

BCCC is a growing provider of STEM training and transfer education. Students can earn a two-year associate degree in Robotics Technology, Engineering Transfer and Biotechnology. BCCC launched its new Cyber Security and Assurance associate degree and certificate programs in response to the burgeoning demand for experts in data security.

Through these programs, BCCC students can transfer to a four-year institution or immediately enter the workforce. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average salary for entry-level cyber security professionals starts at approximately \$88,000.

Last year, BCCC received a \$750,000 grant from the NASA Minority University Research and Education Project. The goal of the grant is to increase the number of STEM classes available at minority-serving community colleges and to provide STEM educator training. BCCC plans to use the \$750,000 to increase the success rate and workforce development of underrepresented students such as women, African Americans and disadvantaged veterans enrolled in its engineering-related programs.

African-American doctor, minister of hope inspires youth to stalk their dreams

Washington, D.C.— If you can't see it, you have a hard time achieving it. That's one of the problems, which afflicts kids growing up in poor minority neighborhoods. If youth don't see doctors, lawyers and other professionals that look like them, it can be hard for them to envision it for themselves. The absence of mentors willing to reveal their own "low lights" can also make dreams seem less obtainable to students that encounter uneven academic performance or other setbacks.

A physician and executive director of a national non-profit association, Dr. LaMar Hasbrouck uses his journey from welfare, low expectations and institutionalized racism to acclaim as a nationally recognized health expert to motivate young people.

"I don't recall hearing a professor or mentor share his or her low lights with me on their road to success," said Dr. Hasbrouck. "Believing that there is no room for mistakes or failures can make a lofty goal seem almost unobtainable. So I use my setbacks as a blueprint for resilience."



Dr. LaMar Hasbrouck
Courtesy Photo

Dr. Hasbrouck has embarked on a multi-city tour during his spare time to

inspire, challenge and encourage youth to reach for their personal dreams despite their tough circumstances. In fact, he emboldens them to embrace their hardships so that they can someday be a source of inspiration for others.

In his recently published memoir titled "G Street Lion: Stalking a Dream" (iUniverse, May 27, 2016) he describes how he overcame obstacles, naysayers, and self-doubts to survive the rigors of a top university, walk-on to a major college football team, eventually becoming captain and jump through countless hoops to gain entrance into medical school. His motto: "you cannot have a testimony without a test."

Dr. Hasbrouck has begun to share his testimony with students on college campuses, including HBCUs, at high schools and at youth development and mentoring programs. He recently spoke at Harvard University, American University in Washington, D.C. and Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan.

Reciting colorful stories of his past

low lights and strategies to rebound, he delivers a simple message: your personal story is your personal power.

"Success requires only optimism and a stubborn belief in oneself," he writes in his memoir. "I remind young people that as long as they stay hungry and humble, success is possible."

To bare all with absolute honesty is never easy for anyone, let alone a public figure who has reached the top of his field but Dr. Hasbrouck sees it as a part of his legacy to give back.

Whether through his book or during one of his live sharing sessions, he captures the attention and ignites the imagination of young dreamers with his simple epiphany that helped him confront his worst fears, pursue his biggest dreams, and realize a future far brighter than he could have planned.

His book is available at Amazon.com, barnesandnoble.com and from other online sellers. For more information about Dr. Hasbrouck visit his website: www.drlamarmd.org.

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Imperative that Flacco improves his sliding technique to avoid injury

By Turron Davenport

Ravens quarterback Joe Flacco is easily Baltimore's most important player. That is usually the case for teams that are fortunate enough to have a franchise quarterback.

Flacco went down with a knee injury last season. The Ravens season went down with that injury.

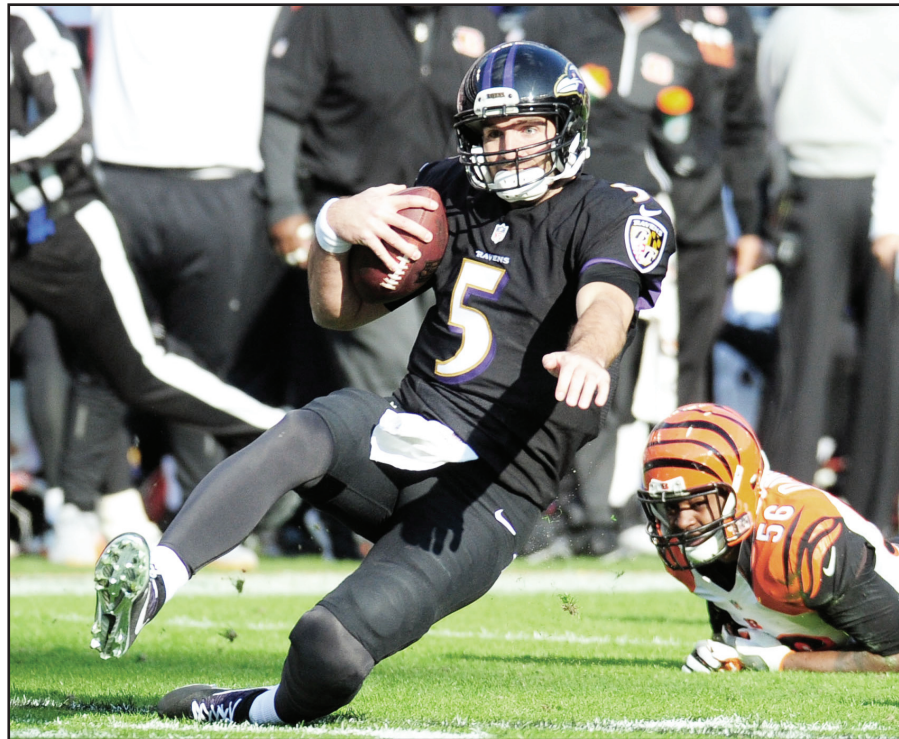
The veteran quarterback returned this season wearing a bulky knee brace and while it has provided support and stabilized Flacco's knee, it also hinders his attempts to slide to protect himself.

Ravens head coach John Harbaugh addressed Flacco's slide attempts recently.

"I just want to see him not drive his brace into the ground," Harbaugh said at his press conference on Monday, November 28, 2016. "It's how he's always slid. He's always slid that way with, what he would describe as a pop-up slide, but it's not working with the knee brace. I see the same thing that everybody else sees, and he knows it."

Flacco's deceptive athleticism shows when he can tuck the ball and run for a first down. If a defender is closing in on him, Flacco will slide to protect himself. However, not using the proper sliding technique is something that has plagued many quarterbacks in the past.

Flacco played baseball in high school



Joe Flacco slides to avoid being tackled by a Bengals defender during a game in the 2016 NFL Season.
Courtesy Photo/NFL.com

and wants to slide the way he was taught at an early age.

Harbaugh does not agree with Flacco's method, and the fiery head coach had no problem making his opinion known in public.

"You don't slide on your knee," Harbaugh explained. "He and I have had that

conversation. He can be mad at me now because I said it publicly, but we all played baseball. He wants to talk about a pop-up slide. Maybe that's what he did in high school, but you can't do a pop-up slide on a knee brace. It's just as simple as that. You've got to get down there on those glutes. That's what has to happen. It's not the first time he'll have heard that."

The Ravens have five games left in the season and are currently on top of the AFC North standings. This may be the last hurrah for some players such as Steve Smith Sr. and Terrell Suggs.

Baltimore cannot afford to lose Flacco as they go down the stretch. A self-imposed injury from not sliding properly would be disastrous for the Ravens. Flacco has already had a few close calls in when his brace broke because he slid awkwardly to avoid contact.

Going forward, it is imperative that Flacco protects himself and the team. There will be times when he scrambles for yards and slides at the end of his runs. He will need to make sure he uses proper technique.

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A Lesson in American Government:

C-SPAN visits Frederick Douglas High School

By Tiffany C. Ginyard

Students at Frederick Douglas didn't know what to expect when they followed their American Government teacher out of the classroom to a tour bus parked outside.

They didn't ask many questions either. What for? They were only evading a lecture and some class work. It was a Friday. Never mind that the school day had just begun, the weekend was on their minds— Snapchat, Twitter and Facebook too. That wasn't surprising. They are teenagers.

The young people's indifferent faces lit up with curiosity once aboard the Cable-Satellite Public Affairs Network's (C-SPAN) award-winning, 45-foot customized tour bus fully equipped with a sound-proof live broadcast studio and a mobile newsroom that showcases the network's programming and resources on social networking and mobile apps.

Once students realized they were more familiar with their surroundings than not, they were comfortable enough to ask Doug Hemmig, a C-SPAN marketing representative, "What's all this for?"

Frederick Douglas was one of the last stops on the nonpartisan news organization's country-wide tour visiting middle and high schools, and universities, encouraging students to think critically about the nation's political climate and issues that affect the communities where they live, work and play. The tour was a particularly unique experience for this group of students. Just two days before, Donald Trump was elected president of the United States of America. And in just two more years, this class of students will graduate from high school and be of



Students' faces peak with curiosity once aboard C-SPAN's award-winning, 45-foot customized tour bus fully equipped with a sound-proof live broadcast studio and a mobile newsroom that showcases the network's programming and resources on social networking and mobile apps. Courtesy Photo

age to exercise their right to vote. It is their participation in the political process that will impact how the consciousness of this country is reflected in the White House moving forward.

"They need this," said Rene Armstead, a long-term substitute for an American Government class at the school. "A lot of the students don't understand the way our government works, the role of a president. If they did, we wouldn't have a lot of the anger that we have today."

Armstead recalled what it was like the day after the election in his classroom. Some students were angry, he said.

Many of them expressed their thoughts about the voting process and how they felt their vote doesn't count for much.

"It's very important that our students understand the nuts and bolts and try to get the whole picture so they can formulate their own opinion," said Armstead. "Right now they are feeding into the frenzy. And right now we have to get political. Sometimes we get emotional and personal but we have to realize what candidate is going help us politically."

Hemmig gave an interactive media literacy lesson using mobile devices demonstrating C-Span resources and

in-depth public affairs programming and educational resources through touch-screen quizzes on flat-screen monitors mounted to the walls of the bus.

"The best part of my job is representing a network whose mission is to provide citizens unfiltered access to their government," said Hemmig, who has worked for C-SPAN for 16 years. "I hope students walk away with a resource they can use to follow their government."

Hemmig navigated C-SPAN's Campaign 2016 App and the network's searchable, video-rich site modeling for students how to access every C-SPAN program aired since 1987. The public can access this extensive online collection— over 220,000 hours of public affairs programming— for free, and share user-generated video clips by email and social media.

Rene and other instructors who boarded the bus with their students learned about C-SPAN's free comprehensive online educational resources including: C-SPAN.org; C-SPAN Classroom; and C-SPAN's nationwide documentary contest, StudentCam; open to students in grades six to 12.

StudentCam encourages middle and high school students to think critically about issues that affect our communities and nation. This year, students are being asked to create a five to seven minute documentary on this year's theme, "Your Message to Washington: What is the most urgent issue for the new President and Congress to address in 2017?"

The tour officially ends this month and will gas up and hit the road after the 2017 Presidential Inauguration to do it all again.

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French play hits Center Stage as \$32 million renovation nears completion

By Stacy M. Brown

The city's biggest professional theater company, Center Stage, has entered the homestretch in its yearlong \$32 million renovation, the most extensive in the 150-year-old building's history.

As the remodel, which will result in more public areas, meeting spaces and a 99-seat theater among other amenities approaches its conclusion, the famed Mount Vernon hotspot will play host to "Les Liaisons Dangereuses," a play based on the 1782 novel by Pierre Choderlos de Laclos about two French aristocrats, the Marquise de Merteuil and her ex-lover, the Vicomte de Valmont, who challenge each other to seduce unsuspecting innocents in a story of revenge, debauchery and hidden motives.

"I ... think this play challenges the concepts of power and gender and what we believe about sex. It's exciting to kick off the season with a female protagonist who is an intellectual giant – who gets to be deliciously manipulative and evil," said Hana Sharif, the show's director.

"I've been talking about the play as a clash of titans or a game of gods between Merteuil and Valmont. These two figures are deeply flawed people. They are all at once magnetic and irresistible and dangerous in every way," said Sharif, who's also the associate artistic director at Center Stage.

The story is set at a moment that is right on the cusp of the French Revolution, a time when there had been no greater divide between the haves and the have-nots, the aristocracy and the common man, according to Sharif.

"But, inside the world of the play, people feel very isolated from the poverty and the dangers of a world on edge. And that resonated with me in 2016," she said. "Anywhere you look in the world today, it feels like we're just the razor's edge away from World War III, but part of the insulation and the privilege of the life that most of us live is that we can pretend as if that's not really the case, because it doesn't necessarily influence our day-to-day life."

Audiences attending the play might be dazzled by the lush costumes from the



Cast for the play (Left to right) Gillian Williams, Brent Harris and Suzanne Douglas at *The Engineers Club* in Mount Vernon.
Courtesy Photo

Marie Antoinette-period of France, which include luxurious and daring necklines.

"I think if you're coming to see a great period piece, you're going to be satisfied. And if you're coming to see something that speaks to your contemporary sensibility, you're going to be fulfilled," Sharif said.

As for the renovations, Michael Ross, the managing director at Center Stage says they are right on schedule for an exciting March 3, 2017, Grand Re-opening.

"For now, we're happy to be bringing audiences safely and intriguingly through our renovations to present our production of 'Les Liaisons Dangereuses' in our Pearlstone Theater," Ross said. "This is a truly transformational renovation of Center Stage. Our spaces will look and feel completely different. The public spaces will be much

more open and inviting. Our Head Theater on the fourth floor is being completely redesigned, and we're adding a new 99-seat space – The Third Space – to be able to produce works for younger audiences, as well as more family programming."

Now, Center Stage will have a brand-new education center called the Eddie C. and C. Sylvia Brown Education Center, which will allow for an expansion of its educational programming, Ross said.

Additionally, the new Terry H. Morganthaler Costume Shop will be a great addition for the costume team; and the new Sherman Café and Bar will be a place for patrons to gather before and after performances, he said.

"The renovation will help us create a welcoming environment for everyone who enters our theater doors. In addition to our Mainstage, Off Center and Family

Series productions, Center Stage ignites conversations among a global audience through our digital initiatives, which explore how technology and the arts intersect," Ross said.

"The theater also nurtures the next generation of artists and theater-goers through the Young Playwrights Festival, Student Matinee Series and many other educational programs for students, families and professionals."

Les Liaisons Dangereuses opens Friday, December 2 and closes Friday, December 23. For more information or to purchase tickets, visit www.centertage.org or call the box office at 410-332-0033.

Specialty cupcakes are “sweet success” for local company

By Ursula V. Battle

Tyreese Johnson recalled the delicious smells that would fill the air on Saturday mornings.

“My mother ran a small in-house bakery, and would bake pineapple upside cakes, strawberry shortcakes, pies from scratch and other homemade desserts,” recalled Johnson. “My mother also made wedding cakes. It was nice to wake up and smell my mother cooking those cakes and pies. It was wonderful. I try to incorporate that same homemade taste and feeling in my cupcakes.”

Johnson is the owner and operator of Mela T Bakery, which she describes as a “Cupcakery.” Mela T. Bakery specializes in uniquely flavored and designed cupcakes.

“I re-invented some of my mother’s same classic cake recipes, and combined that with my love for beautiful designs and colors,” said Johnson. “I wanted to keep the [authenticity] of what I remember growing up. I also wanted to step outside the box.”

The company offers a wide variety of cupcakes, which fall under one of the following categories: Classic, Premium, Signature, Cocktail and Seasonal. Classic Vanilla with Buttercream; Premium Pink Lemonade; Premium Red Velvet; Signature Pineapple Upside Down; Signature Peaches and Cream; and Signature Butter Rum are among the wide variety.

Seasonal flavors include Sweet Potato, Pumpkin, and Apple Spice cupcakes, which were made especially for the Thanksgiving holiday. With the football season in high gear, Mela T Bakery’s Ravens cupcakes have been a ‘hit’ for Ravens fans, with the tasty desserts coming adorned in edible jerseys and footballs.

“Everyone loves a good cupcake,” said Johnson. “But we also plan to extend our cupcake offerings to include healthier alternatives.”

Johnson recalled how she started Mela T Bakery.

“I was asked to make cupcakes for a barbeque,” said Johnson. “Everyone loved them and starting asking me for



Tyreese Johnson, owner/ operator of Mela T Bakery

my business card. The demand for my cupcakes became so great that I decided to start my own business.”

Mela T. Bakery, whose name Johnson says is derived from her nickname “Melody,” has been in business since May 2013. According to Johnson, the company has steadily grown, with the bulk of the company’s orders being birthday cupcakes for kids and teenagers.

“I offer delicious, homemade cupcakes, but I am big on branding,” she said. “Branding is important when it comes to building a business or empire. I also put a lot of time into packaging, which includes information inside the packaging on how to store the cupcakes. I am also big on follow-up, so we place follow-up phone calls. We want people to remember us.”

Johnson’s mother Joanne Johnson, who inspired her daughter to begin making cupcakes, now assists her with Mela T Bakery.

“My mother helps me with the prep, especially with the large orders,” said Johnson. “She also helps me on the administrative side. I also have a few assistants, which include my sister Ashley.”

Johnson, 36, is a native of Baltimore. She graduated from Milford Mill Academy, and attended UMUC (University of Maryland University College). The future looks “sweet” for Johnson.

“Business has been very good,” she said. “My ultimate goal is for Mela T Bakery to have a storefront. We also want to get our cupcakes into a major food retailer.”

She added, “Everyone feels their product is the best. Anyone can Google ‘How to make a cupcake.’ But my cupcakes are made from my very own scratch ingredients and personal designs. I wanted to create a cupcake experience that people could eat with their hands, but taste with their soul.”

The company can be found on Facebook under Mela T Bakery & Events. For more information visit melatbakery.wixsite.com.



StepAfrika! and BSO present world premiere: Nutcracker à la Ellington

By Deborah Bailey

Start your holiday season with an evening at the Meyerhoff Symphony Hall between Friday, December 9 and Sunday, December 11, 2016. The Baltimore Symphony Orchestra (BSO) and Step Afrika! have collaborated to present the world premiere of *Swingin' Nutcracker à la Ellington*, an energetic holiday performance combining music, dance and a unique cultural twist on the traditional Nutcracker story. (StepAfrika! will also perform at the Strathmore on Thursday, December 8, 2016).

The BSO will perform Duke Ellington's jazz transformation of Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker Suite* as the internationally acclaimed Step Afrika! Dance Ensemble interprets the journey of a young Duke Ellington from 1920s Washington, DC to international acclaim in the 1960's through the medium of dance.

"This collaboration is our biggest performance ever with a full orchestra and a jazz ensemble all on the stage at the same time. I'm really looking forward to seeing how these two artistic cultures will be merged," said C. Brian Wilson, founder and executive director of Step Afrika! "We're telling a very different story of the Nutcracker. We're going to look at Duke Ellington's story as a young boy growing up in 1920s Washington D.C. and the road he traveled to become one our country's and community's most celebrated performers."

Swingin' Nutcracker à la Ellington represents a totally fresh, new collaboration of two cultural institutions, according to Tonya McBride Robles, vice president and general manager of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra.



StepAfrika!

Courtesy Photos

"The artistic and operations staff of Step Afrika! and the BSO have been working together for months on the production design," McBride Robles said. "All of us are excited to see these plans come to fruition in the world premiere next week."

Bowie State University graduate, Reginald Barrington is proud to represent his hometown region in the upcoming *Nutcracker à la Ellington* performance. Dancing professionally is a dream come true that Barrington now uses to inspire other young people to pursue their own dreams.

"I started stepping in Eleanor Roosevelt High School in Greenbelt, Maryland. I came back to coach my high school step team for three years and continued my love and passion for stepping and dancing as a member of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc.," said Barrington, recounting his step-dancing journey. "Eventually I found out about an awesome opportunity to join a professional dance company, Step Afrika! Now I've been able to tour the world and travel, teach and inspire. I would have never thought that I would be dancing and stepping as a profession."

Step Afrika! is the nation's first professional dance company dedicated to the art form of "stepping" a staccato dance style originated from African-American Greek-letter organizations. The whole body is used as an instrument through rhythmic

clapping, song and body-foot motions, reminiscent of the African gum-boot dance, according to Elizabeth Fine, author of "Soulstepping: African American Step Shows."

Step Afrika! has toured more than 70 countries and ranks as one of the top ten African-American dance companies in the United States. The company blends step dance with traditional African dance and other contemporary dance forms into a cohesive artistic expression, according to Wilson.

"Come prepared for an original performance that combines dance, music, storytelling, song and always— audience participation," Wilson said.

Robles pointed out that *Nutcracker à la Ellington* is the forward-thinking collaboration for which the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra is known. The BSO is recognized as one of America's leading innovative orchestras and is among Maryland's signature artistic institutions.

Tickets for all performances range from \$25 - \$60; children 12 and under are half price. For more information, performance schedule and tickets for *Nutcracker a' la Ellington*, visit: BSO-music.org.



C. Brian Wilson, founder and executive director of Step Afrika!

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Rambling Rose

The Gift of Giving



Rosa Pryor Trusty

Hello my dear friends, this is the season of giving— not that giving isn't the right thing to do all year around, but from Thanksgiving through Christmas, we are charged to give in abundance.

It's the time of the year when we should be thankful for being above ground. So many of our family members and friends didn't make it. This is the time of the year that we should be grateful for what we have. There are so many people who don't even have a roof over their heads or know where their next meal will come from.

There are so many people lying in hospitals and nursing homes sick with diseases and illness unable to feed or dress themselves or have the strength to pray. So, if you are one of those people always crying and complaining "woe is me" because you have a headache or your arthritis is flaring up or are upset because you don't have the money to get a new kitchen set— just get over it. Honestly, you have nothing to complain about.

Just remember there are so many people out there so much worse off than you! Thank God for what you have!

This is why I appreciate people, organizations and foundations such as the Bea Gaddy Foundation who feed the less fortunate at holiday time; Carlos Hutchins of CH Productions, who raises funds for children; Charm City Jazz, fundraises for the homeless; and Lou Fields, Bilal Ali, Trinity Chapter No. 5 of the Eastern Stars give to the needy. I know of many other organizations and individuals that give back to the community during this time of the year. "Rambling Rose" sees and hears about you, and I thank you for your service to others.

Hopefully, all who read my column will contribute by going out and sup-

porting the events and the people you read about and in my column every week. It is not always about jumping up and down and having fun. Sometimes all it's about is helping others by purchasing a ticket.

Well folks, I am out of space, enjoy your week and remember if you need me, call me at 410-833-9474 or email me at rosapryor@aol.com. UNTIL THE NEXT TIME, I'M MUSICALLY YOURS.

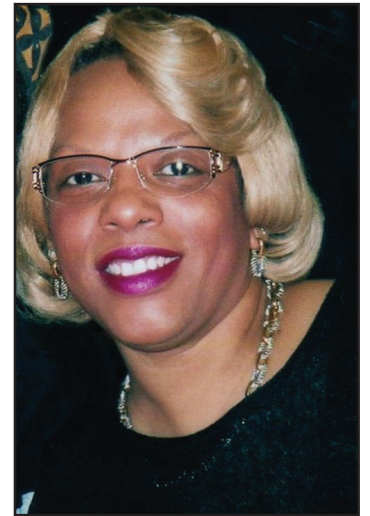


Lou Fields is hosting a Christmas Musical Celebration Show in Upper Marlboro at Evangel Cathedral Church, 13901 Central Avenue with 200 actors including Yolanda Adams, Tamela Mann, Marvin Sapp, Mary Mary and, Kirk Franklin, just to name a few and live animals. Theme is "Christ is Born" on Saturday & Sunday, December 5 thru December 20. Sat. shows are 12 noon-4 p.m.; Sun. shows are 5 pm. For ticket information, call 443-983-7974.



Inside View Band is performing at the Corinthians on Saturday, December 3, 7 p.m. hosted by "Ms. Tee", "Ms. Robin", "Mr. Fingers" and "Ms. Ivory". Portion of the proceeds will benefit Carlos Hutchins "Toys for Disadvantaged Families Program."

Darlene Douglass, the wife of Carlton Douglass will be the Mistress of Ceremony for the "Jazz Expressways Foundation Christmas Jazz Breakfast Show" featuring Rosa Pryor's Washington, DC group "Signature Live" on Saturday, December 10, 10 a.m. -2 p.m. at the Forest Park Senior Center, 4801 Liberty Heights Avenue. Serving a full buffet breakfast, vendor shopping, BYOB, door prizes & book-signing.



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Hill-Aston wins fourth term as president Baltimore Branch of NAACP

By Deborah Bailey

Tessa Hill-Aston remains president of the Baltimore Chapter of the NAACP for a fourth term after beating back rival Cortley C.D. Weatherspoon in the branch's most closely watched election in a generation.

Earlier this month, lines were long at the Forest Park Senior Center as more than 600 NAACP members cast votes and filled the center throughout the day. By the 7 p.m. the cut off time for voters to arrive, members spilled out the doors with the last voters patiently waiting almost two hours to participate in what has been called an historic election.

"This is a fantastic turnout. I've been an NAACP member all my life and I'm 70. I've not seen this kind of turnout very often for a local chapter election. This is important," said lifetime NAACP member Dora Lee Bacote, as she viewed the line stretched out behind her.

Supporters say Hill-Aston quietly gets the "people's work" done as chapter president.

"She supports what veterans do. Baltimore has the only active Veteran's Affairs program in the NAACP. I just think that she is the better candidate," said Darrell N. Truesdale, Sr., Baltimore District Commander of American Legion Post 294.

Cortley C.D. Witherspoon, Hill-Aston's opponent prompted a highly competitive race. Witherspoon is



The lines were long throughout the day as NAACP members voted for local chapter president on Tuesday, November 22, 2016 Photo by Deborah Bailey

involved in several citywide social justice campaigns and serves as Assistant Pastor at Faith Church Baltimore. He said it was time for change in Baltimore's NAACP leadership.

"With the election of Donald Trump as president, Baltimore needs to have very strong leadership and activism. It's time to pass the baton."

Former Baltimore Branch NAACP President, Marvin Cheatham, and several previous branch presidents supported Witherspoon, but their backing was not enough to overcome

Hill-Aston's momentum. "It's not personal—it's business. We can and must do significantly better."

Aston-Hill successfully rallied her supporters with the message that she was not finished with the agenda that originally swept her to victory in 2010. The Baltimore Chapter will host the NAACP's national 2017 convention and Hill-Aston believed it was important to remain at the helm and ensure Baltimore benefits.

"Three years ago, I won a bid for the NAACP National Convention. The host city chapter puts the juice and muscle into the convention at the local level," Hill-Aston said. "This is a free event for Baltimoreans and an excellent opportunity for our city's entrepreneurs. I want thousands of Baltimore citizens to get involved."

Hill-Aston admitted that many of the successes of the Baltimore Chapter have been quiet ones.

"The branch is getting work done on a grass-roots level. We help people with evictions; we help people who have been in jail and need a fresh start," Hill-Aston said. "When the NAACP gets involved with inmates who are not getting medical attention they get help. We help the homeless find housing; we help those with nowhere else to turn and get results."

Aston-Hill is the first woman to serve as president of the Baltimore Chapter since Enolia McMillan, who served from 1969 to 1984. McMillan went on to become the first female President of the National NAACP.

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Additional information for specific projects can be obtained by contacting Donna Bolender, AECOM, Sabre Building, Suite 300, 4051 Ogletown Road, Newark, Delaware 19713, donna.bolender@aecom.com, Qualifications will be due by December 16, 2016.

These projects are, in part, funded by Revolving Loan Funds and other Federal and State funding sources. All subcontractors will be required to follow all pertinent guidelines as related to specific funding sources.

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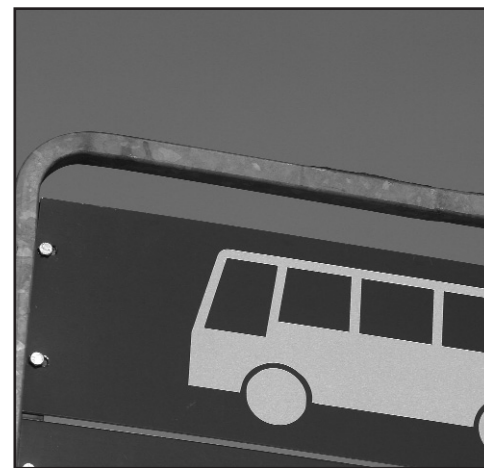
MTA offering free rides on Commuter Bus #425 to Aberdeen Proving Ground

Complimentary rides between December 12 and 16, 2016 on the Baltimore to Aberdeen Route will encourage workers to leave their cars at home

Baltimore— The Maryland Department of Transportation's Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) will offer a free ride week on Commuter Bus #425 between Aberdeen and Baltimore from December 12 to December 16, 2016.

The MTA launched the new bus service in October as a part of Baltimore-Link, the transformative transit plan that Governor Larry Hogan unveiled in October 2015. Commuter Bus #425 connects Baltimore to White Marsh, Edgewood and Harford County's largest employer, Aberdeen Proving Ground (APG). APG workers who hold monthly passes for Commuter Bus #425 can receive a reimbursement from the MTA.

"Commuter Bus #425 is a great new reverse commute service and we want to encourage everyone to take advantage of it," said MTA Administrator and CEO Paul Comfort. "Once people who drive between Baltimore and Harford County see the ease, convenience and low cost of riding Commuter Bus #425, we are



confident that many will choose to leave their cars home every workday."

The cost to ride Commuter Bus #425 ranges from \$3 to \$5 depending on the boarding location. The new Commuter Bus #425 operates on the following schedule with several stops on the APG campus:

•Northbound Weekday Morning Service: Departs Wolfe and Monument streets at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore City at 5:10 a.m., 6:10 a.m. and 7:10 a.m., and arrives at APG at 6:50 a.m., 7:50 a.m. and 8:50 a.m., respectively.

•Southbound Weekday Afternoon Service: Operates a similar route in reverse leaving Raritan Avenue and Havre de Grace Street at 3 p.m., 4 p.m. and 5 p.m., arriving to its last stop in Baltimore City at Wolfe and Monument streets at 4:33 p.m., 5:33 p.m. and 6:33 p.m., respectively.

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