

SPORTS

Panther Creek seniors celebrate their signing day.



COMMUNITY FOCUS

Black History Quiz Bowl winners hosted by Omega Psi Phi.

The Triangle Tribune

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« 52 WEEKS OF BLACK BRILLIANCE »

Before Rosa Parks, there was Sarah Keys

STAFF REPORTS

"Three years before Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to move to the back of a city bus in Alabama, Sarah Keys had led the way with a similar act of courage."

As a member of the integrated Women's Army Corps, Private First Class

Sarah Keys served her country as a receptionist at Fort Dix, New Jersey.

When she boarded a bus home to North Carolina in 1952, she never expected to be arrested and charged with disorderly conduct for refusing to move to the rear so a white Marine could take her seat.

Her landmark 1955 civil rights victory, "Sarah Keys

v. Carolina Coach Company," not only desegregated interstate bus travel, it also provided the legal precedent needed during the 1961 Freedom Rides to pressure the Interstate Commerce Commission to properly enforce its Sarah Keys ruling. Often overlooked in many accounts of the civil rights era, her arrest and victory are crucial

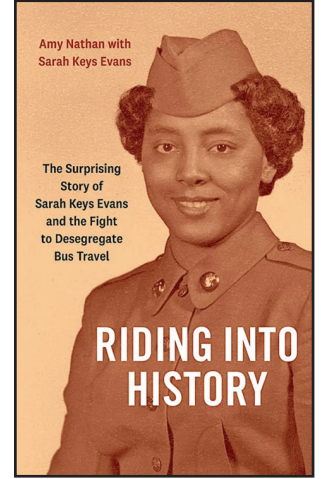
milestones in the fight against segregation.

"Riding into History" draws on years of personal conversations with Sarah Keys Evans, as well as extensive research to present a biography of this hero and her role in the struggle for civil rights, alongside the long history of many other Black Americans, especially women, who

protested racial segregation in interstate travel.

Riding into History:
The Surprising Story of Sarah Keys Evans and the Fight to Desegregate Bus Travel

By Amy Nathan with Sarah Keys Evans
Duke University Press
Release date: March 24



Durham clarifies Hayti project, yet public scrutiny remains on funds

By Kylie Marsh

kylie.marsh@triangletribune.com

DURHAM - Durham's Office of Economic and Workforce Development presented an update on the Fayetteville Street Corridor Project at last week's City Council work session. The presentation comes after a council meeting in January that left residents demanding more transparency and information about the Hayti Promise Community Development Corporation.

Joshua Gunn, director of the Office of Economic and Workforce Development, presented on the timeline of the project, its

initiatives and, most importantly, where the funds are. "The focus today is simply transparency and facts," he said.

Hayti Promise CDC was developed in 2023, but the organization did not receive its 501(c)(3) nonprofit status until last December. Its goals are "improvement without displacement." That is, to revitalize the Fayetteville Street Corridor by stabilizing and repairing homes and businesses, preserving the history and cultural identity of Hayti, and to drive equitable economic growth for a thriving future of the corridor.

Most importantly, community

members want to know where the \$10 million in ARPA funding is. The funds were broken into two amounts: \$6,755,000 and \$3,245,000. Roughly \$853,724 has been spent, and approximately \$5.4 million is tied up in contracts with community partners.

"The funds are only released as work is completed, which is why the amount of money that has been spent is a lot smaller than the amount of money that has been contracted," Gunn said. The strategic plan has a timeline of 30 months, occur-

Please see HAYTI/2A



COURTESY

An artist's rendition of the Villages of Hayti.

Closing is complete on Villages of Hayti

STAFF REPORTS

DURHAM - The Durham Housing Authority, in partnership with Durham Community Partners, announced on Tuesday the successful close of Villages of Hayti. The partners consist of Harmony Housing Affordable Development, Gilbane Development and F7 Development, and guided by the Hayti Community Advisory Committee.

The Villages of Hayti will be a 252-unit, affordable housing development to Durham's historic Hayti neighborhood. The closing officially launches the long awaited redevelopment of the former Fayette Place site, which has remained vacant since the early 2000s. Construction to begin in the coming weeks, with completion of Phase 1 set for fourth quarter 2027.

Villages of Hayti is structured as a 100% Low Income Housing Tax Credit development, with all units restricted to households earning between 30% and 80% of Area Median Income, utilizing income averaging to deepen affordability. In accordance with N.C. Finance Housing Agency, 26 units are specifically designated as mobility-impaired units for people with disabilities or individuals experiencing homelessness.

As a property previously owned by the Durham Housing Authority, the approximately 20-acre site will include a mix of 81 one-bedroom, 113 two-bedroom, and 58 three-bedroom apartments across nine garden style walk-up buildings. A 4,000 square-foot community building will anchor the site, offering a multipurpose room, computer and office center, and exercise room. Outdoor amenities include a playground, shaded seating areas and a centrally located covered picnic pavilion. The site's location ensures residents have convenient access to transit, employment, education and cultural amenities.

"Reaching the initial closing for Villages of Hayti underscores what's possible when strong partnerships align around community priorities," said James Triano, Harmony Housing executive vice president. "Public-private collaboration is essential to advancing affordable housing at scale, allowing us to leverage critical resources, share expertise and deliver meaningful reinvestment in historic communities like Hayti."

The project includes a \$6.2 million ground lease note and \$17 million in funding from the city of Durham, alongside federal tax credit equity and additional public and private financing partners.

"As a Black-owned, community-based development firm, F7 approaches projects like Villages of Hayti with a deep sense of responsibility," F7 International Development President James (Monte) Montague said. "Partnering with the Durham Housing Authority and Harmony Housing Affordable Development, this financial closing marks a critical step toward a larger, community-driven vision for Hayti — one that prioritizes long-term affordability, cultural preservation, and future phases that include homeownership opportunities designed to support stability, opportunity and generational wealth for the families who call this neighborhood home."

The financial close of Phase 1 also sets the foundation

Please see VILLAGES/2A

NC primary delivers textbook display of Black voting power

By John McCann

N.C. BLACK ALLIANCE

During a town hall at Edgecombe Community College in October, North Carolina Rep. Shelly Willingham was going back and forth a little bit with constituents about why he voted to override vetoes by Gov. Josh Stein, a fellow Democrat.

Willingham pointed to what he'd done to get results for the people he represents in Bertie, Edgecombe and Martin counties. Some were in the audience. A good 99% of them were Black and not trying to hear Willing-

ham's yammering. So, the brazen legislator matter-of-factly gave them an option.

"I think I've been effective, and the only thing I can say to you is that if you really think I've been ineffective, then, you know, we're elected every two years, and you can remove me," Willingham said. "You can unelect me."

And the constituents said amen.

When the primary polls closed March 3, 56% of the voters in N.C. District 23 had cast ballots in favor of having Patricia Smith represent them in the North Car-

olina General Assembly rather than Willingham. It was a textbook example of Black people leveraging their voting power.

The North Carolina Black Alliance came alongside several community groups to organize that Edgecombe County town hall. No mainstream media bothered to show up at the rural campus. There was nothing gaudy about the setup; just Willingham on stage with N.C. District 5 Sen. Kandie Smith and Susan Perry Cole, the president and CEO of the North Carolina

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Durham leaders clarify Hayti project and funds

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ring between 2025 and 2028. "These are very large, complex real estate projects, and they take time," Gunn said.

During a public comment session at the January council meeting, community members complained about the project not moving fast enough. "The CDC does not have the ability to unilaterally do anything to anyone else's property without property owners' agreement," Gunn said. Federal requirements also slow things down due to extensive documentation and competitive procurement. That said, the deadline for ARPA funds to be spent is

December.

"As you all know, our corridor is rich with history," Gunn said, "and many of our homes are historic in nature based on their age but also based on who occupied them. We have some of Durham's most prominent Black residents who occupied these dwellings."

In an email to The Tribune, Hayti Promise Board Chair Cheryl Brown wrote: "Hayti Promise's mission is to become the catalyst for building a vibrant future of inclusive growth, innovation, and opportunity that inspires and sustains generations to come through economic development, community empowerment, and cultural preser-

vation of the Fayetteville Street Corridor."

There is, however, still community scrutiny regarding the formation of the CDC, its legitimacy and how the funds are being moved around.

Angel Iset-Dozier spoke following the presentation, saying the strategic plan was supposed to be a fund, not a neighborhood revitalization plan.

"I was the project leader of this work. I know it in and out," she said. "How is this benefiting the people who lost their homes and their businesses? The people who are responsible for this city being as special as it is."

(Read the entire article on our website.)



FILE PHOTO

Milner Commons is a 55-plus apartment community on New Bern Avenue.

Milner Commons celebrates faith-based partnerships

STAFF REPORTS

RALEIGH — DHIC hosted a special gathering of community members, housing developers, regional leaders and faith partners Tuesday to celebrate the dedication of Milner Commons, a 156-unit affordable housing development for adults ages 55+ of modest means at the site of the former Milner Memorial Presbyterian Church.

Milner Commons is one example of the increasing number of faith-based partnerships reshaping the future of affordable housing in North Carolina.

The development is emblematic of a growing national movement, often called "Yes In God's Backyard," that encourages congregations to reimagine underutilized property as an extension of their mission to serve community needs.

"Across the country, faith institutions are asking how their legacy can live on in new ways. This event

brings together partners who are turning shared values into tangible housing solutions - not just for today but for the long-term health of our region," DHIC President and CEO Yolanda Winstead said.

Located along Raleigh's first planned bus rapid transit corridor, Milner Commons offers a mix of efficiency, one- and two-bedroom apartments for residents earning up to 60% of Area Median Income.

Designed to support neighbors aging in place, the community includes gathering spaces, supportive services, and preserved natural features that reflect feedback from neighbors and longtime community members.

Milner Commons also includes design elements that honor the church's sanctuary designed by Raleigh architect F. Carter Williams, including repurposed brick, pews and stained-glass windows.

Milner Commons reflects

a collaborative effort between DHIC, Glenaire, a Kintura community; and the Presbytery of New Hope to transform the former church land into housing that continues Henry H. Milner and the congregation's longstanding commitment to serving the community.

"There are people out there, people of modest means, who need and deserve a home in a place such as Milner Commons. Together, our partners are providing amazing, affordable options for many people who might otherwise not get such an opportunity," Kintura CEO Tim Webster said.

Milner Commons was made possible through key partnerships with the Presbytery of New Hope, Kintura, the city of Raleigh, the North Carolina Housing Finance Agency, Banc of California and Enterprise. The design team included Cline Design Associates, Kimley-Horn and Blum Construction.



JOHN MCCANN

North Carolina Rep. Shelly Willingham, right, listens while state Sen. Kandie Smith makes a point during a town hall at Edgecombe Community College in October.

NC primary delivers display on Black power

Continued from page 1A

Association of Community Development Corporations.

"This is about y'all," NCBA deputy director Jovita Lee, Ed.D., told the audience that evening.

March 3's primary election was about them, too. It was about Black voters across the state. And NCBA during this election cycle, as it's done for 25 years, has been in place making sure that was understood.

Heading into primary Election Day, NCBA canvassers had accumulated concerted stops at 76,362 doors in 23 North Carolina counties. It wasn't perfunctory door knocking — tap lightly, leave literature, scam. No, it was genuine engagement from NCBA associates seeking understanding about why people were not registered to vote, why they were feeling disengaged with the political process.

Transactional politics don't work. Willingham could teach that at the community college.

So far in this election cycle, NCBA staff members and volunteers have made 267,052 phone calls encouraging people to vote. In fact, there was a Saturday in February when NCBA had members of Black fraternities and sororities gather in a room to do some dialing toward that end.

A week later, NCBA had personnel on the ground in Wake County at Martin Street Baptist Church for Souls to the Polls. There were 32 candidates in there vying for votes. Before any of them got on stage and said a word, NCBA executive director Marcus Bass did some level setting.

"Democracy in its current form is dead," Bass said. "What we're voting for now in 2026 is a new democracy."

In other words, voters are looking for a democracy that works for them — voters like Johnston County resident Vivian Williams, who went to her polling site irked about high

food prices, the mistreatment of immigrants, and the way some individuals so casually and boldly give Black people a hard way to go.

"If things ain't right around you, you shouldn't just sit there and say, 'Well, somebody else is going to do it,' or 'I'm not going to take the time out because it's rigged,' and all this stuff. You get up, and you go vote. I'm here so when I see things on TV that's going my way, then I can say, well, I put my voice in there," Williams said.

Williams' sentiment is the mindset NCBA is infusing into the Black electorate. Results from the primary election offer demonstrated evidence that progress has bloomed. It'll require continued hands in the dirt to bear fruit toward freedom in the November general election.

John McCann is the senior digital communications associate for North Carolina Black Alliance.

Cooper needs to defy NC history in Senate race

By Gary D. Robertson and Bill Barrow

The Associated Press

RALEIGH — North Carolina does not mind electing Democrats as governor, but it is a different matter when it comes to sending them to the U.S. Senate.

Roy Cooper, who led the state for two terms, is trying to change that with a campaign that could reshape power in Washington.

Standing in his way is Michael Whatley, who has Donald Trump's full backing after previously serving as the president's chosen Republican National Committee chairman.

Both Cooper and Whatley easily won their party's primaries last week, solidifying one of this year's marquee Senate races. The campaign will draw hundreds of millions in spending because North Carolina is critical to Democratic efforts to pick up the four seats necessary to win a Senate majority.

Republicans want to frame Cooper as too far left for a state that Trump won three times. That tried-and-true tactic echoes past victories over Democrats they cast as out-of-step rubber stamps for liberal leaders, and it will test Cooper's bond with voters established across four decades of winning campaigns as a state lawmaker, attorney general and governor.

Cooper wants to turn that narrative on its head, charging his Republican opponent with being a tool of "well-connected friends in Washington" who cannot effectively represent the state.

"Look, I'm going to be a strong, independent senator for North Carolina," Cooper said. He said he would work with Trump when it made sense.

Whatley does not shrink from his alliance with the president. "His leadership has changed our country,

and I am proud to stand with him in the fight to secure our border, to strengthen our economy and put America first," Whatley said.

North Carolina is a perennial political battleground that often renders a split verdict. Democrats have kept their grip on the governor's office for more than a century, ceding it to only three Republicans during that time. Since 1968, Republican presidential candidates have won the state in every election except for 1976 and for 2008 — the same year a Democrat last won a Senate race.

Whatley needs those trends to make up for his lack of name recognition as a first-time candidate. As a former political staffer, lobbyist and party leader, he has deep ties in Raleigh and Washington, but less exposure to voters. "It's one thing to be the party guy, and it's another to be the guy on the ballot yourself," said former Gov. Pat McCrory, a Republican who narrowly lost to Cooper in 2016. "We're going to find out whether he has it or not."

Whatley and his supporters began an advertising campaign in the primary even though he did not face a serious challenge for the nomination. "I went to school, I went to church. I played sports. And I worked. I was able to pay my own way through college, through graduate school and law school," Whatley said on Tuesday night. "I have lived the American dream right here in North Carolina."

Martha Goodson, 71, is not so sure. She voted for Cooper in the Democratic primary and has doubts about Whatley's commitment to the state.

"I'm just very hesitant about people that I haven't seen be thoroughly invested in North Carolina," Woodson said. "I know he has served the Republican Party in a leadership role,"

but "I don't know that I had heard his name before it came up for this."

Republicans in Washington say they are eager to mine Cooper's terms as governor, trying to turn his perceived strength into a weakness. Although Democrats emphasize that Cooper has never lost a campaign for state office, McCrory cautioned that he never has faced the kind of negative attacks that he may this year. Looser rules on campaign spending "have changed the game," he said.

Republicans want to mix national fights over issues such as immigration and transgender rights with state-specific matters including crime and how Cooper managed hurricane responses and COVID-19 policy. They have pointed to Cooper's veto of legislation that would have required sheriffs to cooperate with immigration agents seeking to pick up inmates believed to be in the country unlawfully.

The former governor has countered with a focus on the economy, including health care costs. He notes that he persuaded the Republican-controlled General Assembly to expand Medicaid coverage. The issue is back in the spotlight after Republicans refused to extend pandemic-era subsidies for insurance plans purchased through the Affordable Care Act.

Meanwhile, Cooper already is trying to turn discussion of crime and immigration back on Trump and Republicans after two protesters, both U.S. citizens, were killed by federal immigration agents in Minneapolis.

He said Wednesday that he wants "secure borders" and would "insist on federal resources to deport violent criminals" and "fight violent crime."

But, he said, "I think this administration is losing focus on that."

Villages of Hayti

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for future phases of the redevelopment, which will introduce for-sale townhome ownership opportunities designed to support generational wealth, long-term neighborhood stability and the community's vision for equitable growth. Additional phases also include more multifamily housing, commercial spaces to support local businesses, and cultural and community spaces envisioned by residents.

More information about the project is available at durhamcommunitypartners.com/villages-of-hayti.



Students play at the Community School for People Under Six in Carrboro, a child care center that has received federal COVID-19 relief stabilization grants.

North Carolina lawmakers talk doula coverage, child care shortages

By Liz Schlemmer
WUNC

State lawmakers are considering expanding access to birth doulas for Medicaid patients. Twenty-three states allow their Medicaid programs to cover doula services, but North Carolina isn't one of them. A legislative committee reviewed the topic on Tuesday, part of a health care oversight hearing that also included an update on the state's shortage of child care facilities.

Experts say expanding doula services could help address North Carolina's high infant mortality rate, which is ranked 11th highest in the country. Doulas don't deliver babies themselves, but they provide support and information to parents before, during and after childbirth.

"A good amount of evidence shows that doula care is associated with decreased maternal stress, lower C-section rates, lower odds of postpartum depression and anxiety, and improved trust and relationship with the birthing process," said Erin Fraher, a researcher at the UNC-Chapel Hill Cecil G. Sheps Center. "And because of those improved outcomes,

because of fewer postpartum visits to the hospital or visits to the physician, there is potential for cost savings for state Medicaid programs."

Rep. Grant Campbell, R-Cabarrus and a doctor, says allowing Medicaid to cover doula services could help if the profession is properly regulated.

"I've delivered almost 8,000 kids," he said. "I've worked with doulas, and for the most part, they're absolutely fantastic, but there's a difference between a certified doula and someone that says, 'I had a baby, and I hung out with my cousin when she had a baby.' If we're going to get these benefits, we've got to make sure we're getting the right type of personnel there."

Doulas could help address shortages in rural areas. About 28 of the state's 100 counties no longer have any obstetric providers, forcing families to drive long distances to give birth, according to the Sheps Center.

Child care shortage is getting worse. The legislature's health care oversight committee also got an update Tuesday on North Carolina's shrinking availability of child care providers.

While the state's population has grown, the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services reports that the number of child care facilities has dropped from 5,921 in July 2019 to 5,160 in January of this year — a 13% decline.

"If the rate of decline does not improve, we project North Carolina will fall below 5,000 licensed facilities by 2027," the report from DHHS said. "This would be a historic low for the state."

Child care center closures are hitting the state's rural counties particularly hard, with the number of facilities dropping by more than 20% in counties like Camden, Perquimans and Warren.

The state's child care subsidy program is also able to serve fewer kids as it awaits additional funding from the legislature, leading to long waiting lists of eligible families.

While the demand for child care is high, low wages make it difficult for facilities to recruit staff and keep classrooms open. Gov. Josh Stein called on the legislature to approve an additional \$20 million to fund child care subsidies.



A groundbreaking ceremony at Healing Transitions Women's Campus.

Healing Transitions breaks ground on women's center

By Bonitta Best
editor@triangletribune.com

The long-awaited groundbreaking for a new recovery housing facility for women and children became a reality last week.

Healing Transitions hosted the ceremony at its Raleigh Women's Campus where the building will be located. The \$14 million property is part of the organization's Forward Together campaign launch that also coincides with its 25th anniversary.

The housing will help relieve the burden of women in recovery trying to build a sustainable life and reconnect with their families.

"Recovery doesn't end when a woman completes treatment; in many ways, that's when the hardest work begins," Healing Transitions Executive Di-

rector Chris Budnick said. "This new facility ensures women are not forced to choose between unsafe housing and their sobriety. By surrounding them with peers, accountability and support, we are giving women the stability they need to succeed and strengthening families and the entire community in the process."

Research from the Recovery Research Institute and the National Council for Behavioral Health shows that recovery housing is associated with higher abstinence rates, increased employment and greater long-term stability. However, housing options tailored to women in recovery, particularly mothers, are scarce in Wake County. Market-rate rents far exceed what most

women in early recovery can afford, making relapse more likely without supportive alternatives.

"Recovery for me today is so much more than I ever thought," said Jamie, a program participant and alum. "I never thought I would be paying my own bills. I never thought that I would be living successfully as a mother. I get to watch my daughter go to school every single day. She's doing things that I wish I would have done when I was a child. I can be there for my family today because of Healing Transitions."

Construction is to be completed by early 2027. Visit www.healing-transitions.org to learn more.

(A press release contributed to this article.)

Restricting registration forms punishes voters

By Kate Fellman
YOU CAN VOTE

Following a successful primary election with energetic voter participation all over the state, we expect voters to be even more eager to make their voice heard in the fall.

North Carolinians have a pivotal part to play in the midterms. Troublingly, our State Board of Elections is working to undermine them.

On Feb. 27, citing budgetary constraints, the State Board instructed county boards of elections to stop distributing voter registration forms in bulk — a long-established practice all over the country.

Cost concerns aside, the directive likely violates the National Voter Registration Act.

The law requires states to make registration forms freely available, "with particular emphasis on making them available for organized voter registration programs."

You Can Vote, the nonpartisan nonprofit I founded in 2013, is one such program. Every year, we rely on county boards of elections to provide thousands of voter registration forms, which we use to register North Carolinians of all stripes all across the state.

At churches, college campuses, cultural celebrations, county jails, career fairs and anywhere else North Carolinians congregate, You Can Vote, and other civic engagement organizations, are on hand, registering voters en masse thanks to the availability of registration forms in bulk.

Restricting the flow of forms would effectively disenfranchise many of these voters, as other registration options come with their own roadblocks. Voters are out of luck if they can't register online because they don't have a North Carolina driver's license or other form of DMV ID.

They're out of luck if they don't have transportation and time off work to register at their county board of elections office. Same goes for using same-day registration during early voting.

They're out of luck if they don't have access to a printer and postage, prerequisites for registering by mail.

There are many other roadblocks.

Let's start with the newest voters: The majority of 16- and 17-year-olds, who are allowed to pre-register to vote, don't have a DMV ID. Same for the many college students, and others

, who are newcomers to the state.

What about people without access to technology? Seniors in assisted living, residents of rural areas with limited internet connectivity, people awaiting trial in county jails, residents of rehabilitation centers.

For all of these reasons and more, I hope the leadership of the State Board of Elections reverses course and reopens the flow of registration forms.

Their duty is to administer elections, which includes making voter registration widely accessible.

North Carolina voters need the State Board to do its job.

Kate Fellman is the founder and executive director of You Can Vote, a North Carolina nonpartisan nonprofit that educates and registers voters across North Carolina.



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EDUCATION

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(StatePoint) American educators work every day to give their students a brighter future. Unfortunately, not all classrooms are equipped with tools and resources that match the dedication of teachers and the potential of students.


The Rack Room Shoes Gives Teacher of the Year program marks seven years of impact in 2026, a legacy that now includes 30 award-winning teachers across the country. This initiative relies on a community-driven process where individuals nationwide submit nominations detailing the positive and influential impact of dedicated teachers. Following an open call that typically draws over 300 nominations, a public voting period determines the winners who receive both personal rewards and substantial resources for their school communities.

The program has evolved into a vital engine for technological advancement, providing \$10,000 technology grants to each winning school. These funds allow administrators and educators to bridge the gap between traditional instruction and modern, hands-on learning. One winning school, Lead Mine Elementary, allocated nearly 80% of its grant to K-5 robotics and a daily live newscast. This investment enables students to explore circuitry, program robots, and develop leadership through the "Live at the Mine" news program.

Across the country, these grants have historically funded a diverse array of tools, including 3D printers, laptops, STEAM lab resources, and full broadcast systems. By fostering partnerships between families who nominate and communities that vote, the program ensures that corporate support translates directly into inquiry-based learning opportunities. As it enters this new cycle, the initiative continues to acknowledge educators' exceptional dedication while equipping their students with the technical skills necessary for the future.

To learn more about the contest, visit <https://2026rrsteacheroftoyear.cmpgn.page/c01sVI>.

At a time when many schools are underfunded, the commitment of teachers remains unwavering. Fortunately, efforts are being made to honor these teachers while delivering additional resources to benefit students and school communities.

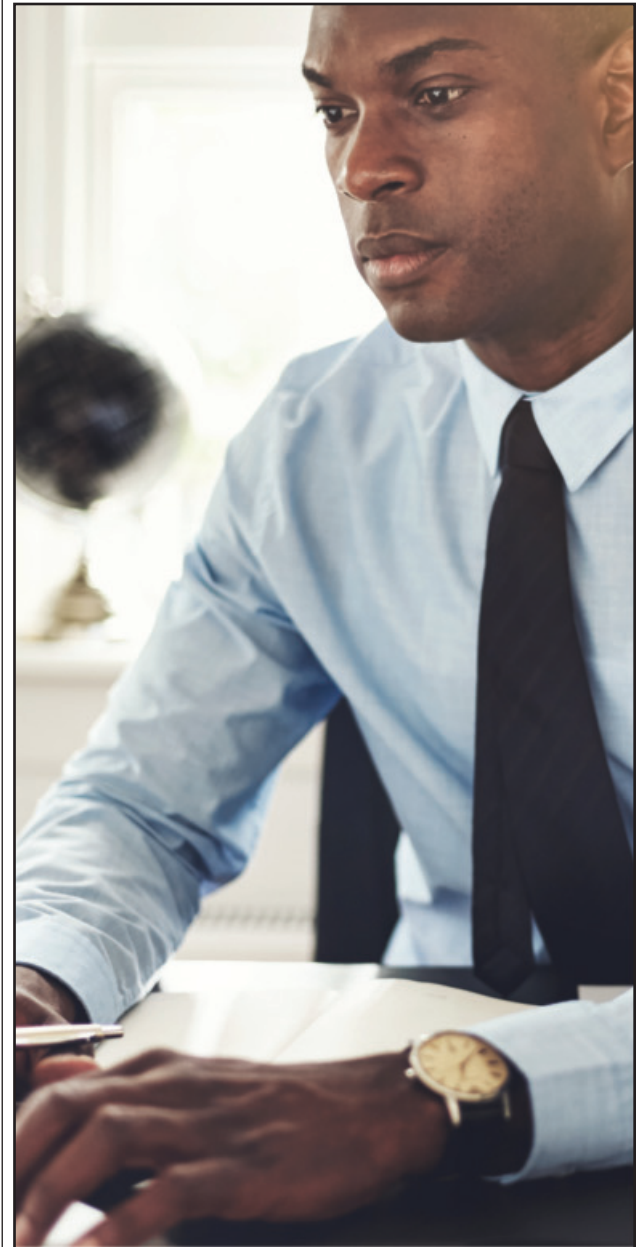


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« OPINION »



Pastors should be able to opt back in to Social Security later in life

By Gary Hollingsworth
BAPTIST PRESS

While a privilege to bear, the demands on pastors are great. For most, ministry is not glamorous.

Roughly half of Southern Baptist churches consist of fewer than 50 people in weekly attendance. Thus, a growing segment of pastors are bivocational to lessen the financial strain on their churches. Very few churches are able to offer medical insurance to their pastor as a benefit. The Lord greatly blesses us by supplying all that we need, but we know that many pastors may not have the financial security they had anticipated or hoped for heading toward retirement.

As some may recall when first entering ministry, pastors must permanently decide if they want to exempt any ministry income from Social Security within the first two years of receiving payment for ministry work. For a variety of reasons, often convictional, a pastor may opt out of Social Security withholdings early on in his career.

Yet, throughout years of ministry, pastors cannot

anticipate the journey God has planned personally, ministerially and financially. A significant decision made years earlier may not seem so wise anymore given the present context. And most often the ones who feel the impact are the families of pastors.

Pastors make personal and familial sacrifices for the sake of Christ and his church. And, while we do it for the joy of the Lord and in faithfulness to our calling, the effects are real. The enemy uses the demands of ministry to create hardships in families and marriages. Sadly, for many pastors, or their widows, opting out of Social Security has inadvertently contributed to that hardship.

The Clergy Act is a bipartisan bill that offers a second chance for clergy members to revoke their previous Social Security exemption. If signed into law, the bill would open a one-time reenrollment window for two years where clergy could opt back in and start contributing to Social Security. Then, after meeting withdrawal eligibility, in-

cluding 10 years of contributions for full retired-workers benefits, they can draw Social Security benefits proportional with their contributions.

Remarkably, the Clergy Act passed out of the House Ways & Means Committee unanimously in December. The ERLC has endorsed this legislation and calls on Congress to swiftly put this bill up for a vote.

Congress should offer this second chance to our spiritual shepherds who have given tremendously to tell people about their second chance at a life reconciled to Christ.

Ministry is sacrificial, rightly reflecting the One who gave His Son as a sacrifice for us. Yet, to honor those who do so much for our communities, and, in turn, our country, our government should remove additional strain and make a way for our pastors and their families to comfortably retire with dignity.

Gary Hollingsworth served as a pastor in Kentucky, Virginia, Alabama and Arkansas.



COURTESY

‘Not Easily Broken’

Self-taught artist’s brand invites communal healing

By Kylie Marsh
kylie.marsh@triangletribune.com

Rene'e Valentine has raised seven children, suffered devastating losses, homelessness, and battled significant health challenges, leaving her disabled.

Valentine said she tried to escape the pain by “going out with the girls” and “male bashing,” then through marijuana. “I started out angry. I started out hurt,” she said, “and I stayed that way for a long time.”

But after the “beer got warm,” she said, “I would just go to my own private island.” She picked up paint and a brush and created her first piece, something that was all her own, using the wood paneling from the back of a picture frame.

“Nobody was saying, ‘why didn’t you do it like that? You should do that color; that’s crooked,’” she explained. “It was something all of my own. I didn’t have to share it, I didn’t have to explain it. And then the more I did it, the happier I became.”

Her experience of healing through art has encouraged her to start her own art brand, Designz -by-Drea, which encourages people to tell their own story through artwork, whether it be in corporate spaces, private homes or a gallery.

The mission of Designz -

by-Drea is “to give everyone a voice and show them the world through their own eyes, to give them freedom from critics, peace, and a place where they can occupy, and live for themselves and themselves only.”

Valentine first lost her mother when she was 16 years old. Then her grandfather, uncle, baby sister and aunt followed. Motivated by these losses, she spent most of her life caring for others.

“I said, the devil is a lie,” Valentine told The Tribune. “I lost a lot of people, and if I couldn’t keep them forever, I wanted to take care of people as long as I could.”

Then, after 26 years, her marriage abruptly ended. “It broke me,” she said. “That pain was something I never wanted to repeat again. It felt like when my mother died.”

“I had to get a job, to go to work, to get an apartment.”

Working as a group home manager, she dove back into her love of caring for others - until she slipped and shattered her pelvis in 2021. She was about to take a birthday trip to Barbados.

Her first expressive work was a masterclass in therapeutic art, expressing her emotions toward her ex-mother-in-law while visiting a friend who was also painting.

“It expresses how I feel. I

think that if you know me, you can look at my artwork, you can kind of gauge where I’m coming from or where I’m going with it,” she said.

The walls in her apartment are adorned with canvases of yellow, red and blue, often using found objects like hair, toys, jewels, photos and text to tell stories through her work.

One includes the letters NEB which stand for “not easily broken.”

“I want it to be a conversation starter, you know? I want you to wonder, and then I want you to hear my story and take it into your house and create your own story,” she said.

One of Valentine’s works hangs in the clubhouse at the Hardee Street Apartments, a project by Self-Help Credit Union. When Valentine moved into another apartment building financed by Self-Help, executives were inspired by her stories and her work.

Now, her goal is to get a storefront to sell her artwork and others.

“I didn’t know I could do this. Because of my past, I have a destructive side, a reckless side, that I can infringe on myself. So, rather than do that, I went a positive route,” she said. “I always had a choice. Rather than be destructive and hurt myself, I can do it in a positive way.”

AROUND THE TRIANGLE

GARNER BLOOD DRIVE
A community blood drive is March 20, 1-5 p.m., and March 21, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., 800 Elmira Avenue. Register: www.redcross-blood.org.

RALEIGH GRANTS
BEGINNINGS Grants to Parents Program for parents with children that are deaf or hard of hearing is accepting applications through March 15. Visit ncbegin.org to learn more.

OPEN HOUSE
Compassionate Early Learning Center will host an open house March 15, noon, 2310 Compassionate Drive. Contact: Carolyn Dove at 919-630-3744.

BLOOM
Art in Bloom, five-day floral festival, is March 18-22, N.C. Museum of Art, 2110 Blue Ridge Road.

LUNCH AND LEARN
NC HOPE’s Lunch and Learn for Justice, Hope and Healing is March 19, noon to 3 p.m., NCWorks Career Center, 1830 Tillery Place, #B. Register: www.eventbrite.com.

OPEN HOUSE
Passage Home is hosting an open house March 19, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., 513 Branch St. Visit: passage-home.org.

FOOD PANTRY
The drive-thru food pan-

try has returned at Southside Church of Christ, March 19, 6-8 p.m., and March 21, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., 800 Elmira Avenue.

CONFERENCE
Citywide Manhood Conference 2026 is March 20-21, Raleigh Marriott Crabtree Valley, 4500 Marriott Drive. Register: www.eventbrite.com.

CONFERENCE
Let’s Talk Racism Conference is March 21, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., N.C. Central’s campus. Register: www.Let’sTalkRacism.com.

ACADEMY
Community Garden Leadership Academy is March 21, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., N.C. Cooperative Extension, 4001 Carya Drive.

GRAND OPENING
HOPE NC’s grand opening of Grosvenor Gardens Pavilion is March 21, 2-4 p.m., Grosvenor Gardens, 1101 Hillsborough St.

PROSTATE
A Prostate Cancer Community Rally is March 21, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., NCCU LeRoy T. Walker Complex, 1450 S. Alston Ave. Men 40 and older can receive a free PSA blood test.

FESTIVAL
Raleigh Tea Festival is March 22, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., Marywood Hall & Garden, 622 Maywood Avenue. Visit: raleigh-teafestival.square.site.

COMMEMORATION
Senator Jeanne Hopkins Lucas Commemoration Week is March 23-27 on NCCU’s campus. Contact: Peace.Ajiroututu@ncleg.gov.

DURHAM VESPERS
Jazz Vespers: A Service of Hope is March 19, 7 p.m., Duke University Chapel, 401 Chapel Drive.

CONVERSATION
The second Community Conversations on Reducing Violence in Durham is March 20, 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Register at www.durhamnc.gov.

EXPO
Black Family Wellness Expo is March 21, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., Hillside High School, 3727 Fayetteville Road.

CHAPEL HILL FUNDRAISER
Shamrock ‘N Run 5K fundraiser for child abuse prevention is March 28, 7:30 a.m., KD house, 219 E. Franklin St. To participate or donate: <https://runsignup.com>.

MISC. SCHOLARSHIPS
Congressional Black Caucus Foundation is accepting applications for its 2026 Scholarship Programs. Visit www.cbfcinc.org. Deadline: March 27.

52 Weeks of Black Brilliance

Our history is at risk of being erased — but The Tribune ensures our voices endure.

Every week in 2026, we’re shining a light on the creators, thinkers, builders, and visionaries who move our culture forward. Fifty-two stories. Fifty-two sparks. A yearlong celebration of black brilliance.

TRIANGLE TRIBUNE
The Voice of the Black Community

BCIC revamps tourney in Virginia

Lonnie Blow is off the ledge.

Blow had been walking the tightrope ever since Virginia State lost in the CIAA Tournament semifinal to Bluefield State. The Trojans were hoping to defend their championship that Fayetteville State eventually won.

But Blow is back on solid footing now. "I got hungry on the ledge," he jokingly said.

He also has to get back into coaching mode, as both the Trojans women's and men's team will be participating in the Black College Invitational Championship March 27-28.

They really had no choice. Virginia State is hosting the BCIC after its inaugural year at Bonita Coliseum in Charlotte was a bust.

According to its website, the two-day tournament is basically a battle between the CIAA and SIAC. Four games will be played on Friday (two women and two men), and the winners meet for the championship on Saturday.

Last year no HBCU Division I teams accepted an invitation. Guess BCIC founder Wes Bellamy, who is also a Virginia State department chair, got the message.

The BCIC may give teams a second life, but it's also an inconvenience.

Just as athletics directors start evaluating their coaching staffs once the season is over, so do head coaches with their rosters. Coaches know which players won't return once the clock strikes 0:00. The humane thing to do is meet as soon as possible and give them two words of pertinent advice: transfer portal. Then hit the road recruiting; unless, of course, the AD calls first.

"There are some players you can't wait to get rid of," said an SIAC coach who asked not to be named. "After you discover who they really are during the season, you don't want to be around them anymore."

The BCIC delays that routine for teams that sign on to play. A coach certainly can't say, "I'm cutting you from the team after you play in this tournament. Let's go win it."

Blow said he generalizes the suggestion a few weeks before the season ends, so no one feels targeted, and players can make their own decisions before he does it for them.

"I tell them the season is almost over. If they're not happy or looking to make a change, then they need to get in the portal as soon as possible," he said.

We Got Next

Next season CIAA basketball will follow in the footsteps of its football colleagues and eliminate divisions.

Yep, no more Northern and Southern winners; teams will be ranked from No. 1 to No. 12. And everybody will play twice.

"This eliminates having to play so many North Carolina Christian schools," Blow said. You know, those schools (bless their hearts) that walk into the gymnasium down by 20 points before the game even starts.

Hey, it's not all the CIAA's fault. Opponents shy away from scheduling good conference teams. Yeah, they'll visit Elizabeth City State but won't travel to Virginia State.

Think West Liberty will return to Virginia Union again in the next century after losing to the Panthers?

Blow said most coaches have been wanting this for a long time. It will help with the conference's strength of schedule while still allowing space for nonconference opponents and a tip-off classic or two.

It's a whole new sports world.



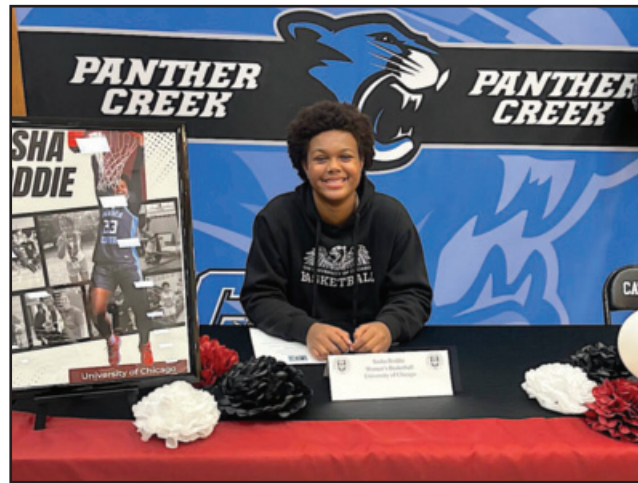
BONITTA BEST

The Triangle Tribune Sports

March 15-21, 2026 | 6A

Signed. Sealed. Ready to Deliver

National Signing Day is a highlight for high school student-athletes – and parents. We'll be highlighting some of the happy campers over the next few weeks, thanks to Wake County Public Schools. First up is Panther Creek.



Basketball: Sasha Boddie, University of Chicago



Basketball: Zy'vaun Puckett, Brunswick Community College



Football: Elijah Quick, Louisburg College



Diving: Kaylee Kim, Davidson College

COLLEGE CORNER

Postseason play begins for HBCU DII teams

Seven HBCU Division II teams are competing this weekend in postseason play.

Winston-Salem State is the No. 3 seed and Fayetteville State is No. 5 in the Atlantic Region. On the men's side, it's the Broncos at No. 5 and Virginia Union at No. 7.

The SIAC also got two women's teams in: three-time SIAC champ Miles and Edward Waters, in just its second season as a DII member, earns an at-large berth in a history-making season. SIAC champion Morehouse is the only representative on the men's side.

WOMEN

N.C. Central

The No. 5-seed Eagles take on No. 4-seed Coppin State in the MEAC Tournament quarterfinals for the second straight year.

The March 12 matchup is past our print deadline, but the result will be posted online and our social media platforms.

Coppin swept NCCU during the regular season, but both games were close. All tournament games will be streamed on ESPN+. The women's championship game is March 14, 4 p.m., on ESPNEWS.

Alumna Ashley Conner is Edward Waters University's new vice president and director of intercollegiate athletics. She was promoted after serving as associate AD for student services and senior woman administrator.

Waters has a social work degree from NCCU, a master's in sport administration from Delaware State and is pursuing a Ph.D. at Alabama A&M. Well, go on with ya' bad self!



COURTESY

N.C. Central men's tennis team

The outdoor track and field season opened last weekend at the Seahawk Invitational on UNC Wilmington's campus.

Melanne Sutton won the 200

meters, Kayla Johnson the 800m, Tia Lucas the high jump and Rachel Key-White the triple

Please see **POSTSEASON/7A**

HBCU FOOTBALL

Jackson State, Tenn. State renew rivalry

By Bonitta Best
editor@triangletribune.com

N.C. Central

Panther Creek senior student-athlete Jaysen Oriol is coming to Eagleland.

Tennessee State

The rivalry between TSU and Jackson State returns this year when the teams meet in the John A. Merritt Classic Aug. 29 at Nissan Stadium. The matchup was discontinued under former JSU coach Deion Sanders in 2022.

The following week Tennessee State will face Georgia. The Tigers will receive \$600,000 for the trip.

Goodbye. Hello.

* Alabama State QB James

Hayes to FAMU
* Virginia-Lynchburg WR Antonio Adams, Tennessee State
* VUL LB Christian "Spike" Wilson, Elizabeth City State
* North Alabama OL/DL Joshua Seudass, Alabama A&M

* Anna Maria College DB Jihad Brown, Norfolk State
* UNC Pembroke QB Tre Robinson, S.C. State
* Arkansas LB Justin Logan, Tenn. State
* Alabama A&M OL TyQuez Richardson, Georgia

Transfer Portal

* Florida A&M QB Tyler Jefferson
* FAMU OLB James Gard-
Please see **RIVALRY/7A**

SPORTS SHORTS

Long Ball Durham needs volunteers

RALEIGH

* USTA Summer League Team registration is March 11-30 for mixed, tri-level and singles. Forms available on Raleigh Tennis Association website.
* RTA's Y'all League (tennis first, beer later) for ages 21-30 and 30 and over begins March 20 at Meredith College and various private clubs. Contact: megan@raleightennis.com.
* Interested in becoming a sports official for Raleigh Parks? An introductory workshop is March 15, 2-3:30 p.m., Green Road Community Center, 4201 Green Road. Call 919-996-4141.

DURHAM

* Long Ball Durham Triple Play

will celebrate its 17th season in May.

Volunteers needed for coaching, announcing games, scoreboard operators and anthem singers. Contact: Pat James at 919-236-3101.

* BallHers Choice Sports, a women's flag football league, has several upcoming tournaments, including its spring eight-women flag league, and a new girls high school league in Raleigh.

Learn more at info@ballherschoicesports.com.

Send your sports announcements, photos to: info@triangletribune.com.



Shaw softball gets its first win.

Postseason play begins for HBCU Division II teams

Continued from page 6A

jump. The ladies also won the 4x400 relay: T'Sheylah Moore, Gianna Marquez, Sutton and Nyree Bacchus.

In tennis, the Eagles had a big 6-1 win over George Mason Tuesday. The ladies host Hampton on campus March 18 at 11 a.m. (barring weather) and Presbyterian March 21, 1 p.m., at Cary Tennis Park.

Shaw
First-year softball coach Teresa Stephens got her first win in a doubleheader split against Chestnut Hill College last weekend.

Shaw, (1-10) hosts Pace University this weekend at Worthdale Park.

In tennis, the seven-time defending champs opened CIAA play with a win at Winston-Salem State. A three-day CIAA-Round-Up is next weekend on Bluefield State's campus.

MEN

N.C. Central

The tennis team is get-

ting a North Carolina highway marker to honor its 2025 HBCU Men's Tennis National Championship. The date and location of the signage will be announced later.

In basketball, the Eagles tied with Norfolk State for third place but won a tiebreaker to take the No. 3 seed in the tourney.

They also open play March 12 against Maryland Eastern Shore. NCCU swept the Hawks during the regular season. The men's championship game is March 14 at 1 p.m. on ESPN2.

In track and field, Orlando McClean won the 100m dash and Juan Tinajero Jr. the 5000m at the Seahawk Invitational. Five thousand meters! How many candy bars is that lined up?

Shaw

The tennis team hosts Johnson C. Smith March 8 at Worthdale Park. The Bears and Golden Bulls

have developed quite a rivalry in tennis going back years.

Tennessee State

Duke alumnus Nolan Smith guided the Tigers to their first conference championship in 32 years. Smith also was named co-coach of the year. TSU earns an automatic bid to the NCAA Tournament.

Morgan State

Two Bears made history in wrestling last week. Eugene Harney and Yannic Charles secured bids to the NCAA Division I Wrestling Championships. Harney is the program's first conference champion since MSU reinstated wrestling.

HBCU basketball openings

Albany State men
Bowie State men
Florida Memorial men
Shaw women and men
Winston-Salem State men



Panther Creek football student-athlete Jaysen Oriol.

Jackson State and Tenn. State renew rivalry

Continued from page 6A

ner

- * Norfolk State QB Vinson Berry
- * Southern QB Jalen Woods
- * Tuskegee QB Raequan Beal
- * N.C. A&T DL Christopher Allen
- * Virginia Union Isaiah Wallace
- * Benedict QB Jackson Jensen

Bull City Proud

Both the Southern School of Energy & Sustainability Spartans women's and men's basketball teams are headed to the NCHSAA 7A State Championship March 14 at Wake Forest University's Lawrence Joel Veterans Memorial Coliseum.

The Spartans have had an incredible 2025-26 season:

Women's Basketball: 27-3 record and riding a 23-game winning streak.

Southern vs. North Mecklenburg, 5 p.m.

Men's Basketball: 27-3 record with more than 2,000 points scored this season.

Southern vs. Mooresville, 7:30 p.m.



DID YOU KNOW?
DID YOU KNOW THAT BOTH SOUTHERN SES BASKETBALL TEAMS ARE PLAYING IN THE STATE CHAMPIONSHIP GAME?

COURTESY OF DRS

BLACK WOMEN PILOTS ACTIVITY SHEET



Hi Everyone!

Even though I fly a lot in Sankofa 82, it never ceases to amaze me what an awesome flying machine she is! It also made me appreciate the fine Black American females who dared to become pilots in the United States. Have you ever been in the cockpit to see how the pilots fly the plane? Let's explore what it takes to become a pilot and meet some of the brave Black American female pilots who took to the skies!

SO YOU THINK YOU CAN FLY!



A pilot is a person that drives a transport vehicle such as an airplane, spacecraft or boat. All types of pilots must pass tests and earn a license before they can operate the vehicle. Airline pilots must be at least 23 years old. A commercial airline pilot's license requires 250 hours of flight experience. The pilots are responsible for making sure that the passengers, crew, and the aircraft itself are safe. Professional female pilots make up only 5% of the piloting workforce, with Black women representing less than 1% of the piloting workforce.

SISTERS OF THE SKIES!

Sisters of the Skies is an organization of professional black women pilots. There are less than 150 black women pilots in the United States holding a license. This organization, which tracks the numbers of Black female pilots, was created to inspire young girls of color to take an interest in aviation through mentoring them and pairing them up with Black female pilots who have already earned their wings.

FIRST BLACK FEMALE PILOT: BESSIE COLEMAN



Even though she started out washing and ironing clothes and giving manicures, Bessie Coleman was determined to make more out of her life. With determination to achieve more, she became excited about learning to fly airplanes. Because flying schools in the United States denied her entry, Bessie took it upon herself to learn French and move to France to achieve her goal. Coleman earned her license from Franco's well known Caudron Brother's School of Aviation. Once back in the United States, Bessie Coleman specialized in stunt flying and parachuting, and earned a living barnstorming and performing aerial tricks. She remains a Pioneer of Women in the Field of Aviation.

I GOT WINGS!



Monique Grayson, Micah Clark, Alexis Brown and Brianna Jackson are 4 Black women who are affecting history. These four are graduates of the Western Michigan University, College of Aviation. They are among the few who make up the Sisters of the Skies who have earned their wings! They are defying the odds and soaring to new heights as commercial airline pilots, all while trailblazing a path to follow for young African American women who are interested in pursuing a career in aviation flight sciences.

POP-UP! ANOTHER SISTER OF THE SKIES...

Miracle Izuchukwu, age 25, is the youngest Black female pilot for a commercial airline.

ONE MINUTE MADNESS!

Unscramble these words in one minute or less. The first letter of each word is in bold.

sratslS fo eht seikS _____
 latP _____
 avAnot _____
 plAairnes _____
 Ftngil _____
 pitokC _____

HIDDEN GEMS

Cross out the names of each animal to uncover who was the first Black female pilot and the name of the organization that inspires young black women to become Black female pilots.

BEAR BESSIE FROG COLEMAN HEN CAT DOG SISTERS WOLF PUPPY OF DEER THE PIG BIRD SKIES

FLIGHT FACTS!

Fill in the blanks from the words in the Word Box below.

Inspire, Monique Grayson, Sisters of the Skies, pilot, Aviation, Brianna Jackson, Aviation, Western Michigan, Alexis Brown, French, Micah Clark

Bessie Coleman was the first Black female _____ University.
 WMU stands for _____
 The professional organization of Black Female Pilots is called _____
 Bessie Coleman learned _____ to attend the Caudron's Brothers School of _____
 Four women who graduated from Western Michigan University College of Aviation: _____
 Sisters of the Skies, which tracks the number of Black Female pilots, was created to _____ young girls to take interest in the field of _____

KEMET



ANSWER KEY

POP-UP! ANOTHER SISTER OF THE SKIES...
 Miracle Izuchukwu

ONE MINUTE MADNESS!
 sratslS fo eht seikS: sisters of the skies
 latP: pilot
 avAnot: aviation
 plAairnes: professional airline
 Ftngil: flight
 pitokC: cockpit

HIDDEN GEMS
 BEAR BESSIE FROG COLEMAN HEN CAT DOG SISTERS WOLF PUPPY OF DEER THE PIG BIRD SKIES

FLIGHT FACTS!
 Inspire, Monique Grayson, Sisters of the Skies, pilot, Aviation, Brianna Jackson, Aviation, Western Michigan, Alexis Brown, French, Micah Clark

Bessie Coleman was the first Black female _____ University.
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 Bessie Coleman learned _____ to attend the Caudron's Brothers School of _____
 Four women who graduated from Western Michigan University College of Aviation: _____
 Sisters of the Skies, which tracks the number of Black Female pilots, was created to _____ young girls to take interest in the field of _____

BLACK WOMEN PILOTS, 3/15/26, #246 WWW.JOEYOUNG.ORG KEMET ACTIVITY SHEETS © 2026 BY JOE YOUNG

Black History Quiz Bowl

The Omega Psi Phi Fraternity held its annual Black History Quiz Bowl at the Omega Multipurpose Center in Garner. Three high school teams participated: Raleigh-Apex NAACP Youth Council; Top Teens of America, Raleigh Chapter; and Garner Road Teen Achievers. The Raleigh-Apex NAACP Youth Council, below, won first place.



COURTESY

Vice Basileus Demond Reed; Michael Braswell; Logan Thomas; Elijah Rodgers; parent and co-adviser LaDonna Rodgers; and Bethany Rodgers, basileus; and Tyler Vincent. Not pictured Mo Johnson.

Smart Gaming: Keep kids safe online

FAMILY FEATURES

Playing video games can be a fun, social experience. However, online gaming also poses real risks, especially for kids.

As a parent, you don't necessarily need to be a gamer yourself to help keep your children safe when the controller is in their hands.

Consider taking proactive steps like these to create a healthy online gaming environment for kids of all ages.

Check System Privacy Settings

As a first line of defense, before your child even starts gaming, spend some time in the device or console privacy settings. Here you can turn off sharing, disable location tracking, limit microphone and camera access, and restrict how other users can interact with your child's profile. Similarly, many games

and platforms include built-in privacy settings that can be tailored to their age and online experience. These settings may allow you to limit who can view your child's profile or send a friend request, message or voice chat.

Research Games

Because not all games are created equal, look up game ratings through a service such as ESRB before buying or downloading to understand the maturity level of the game and determine if it's appropriate. To take it a step further, read reviews from other parents or watch gameplay videos to see if you deem not only the content but also the social interaction acceptable.

Use Facial Age Estimation Online platforms are increasingly looking for ways to keep users safe, and that includes added levels of verification. As part of a

multilayered approach to safety, Roblox is the first online gaming platform to require age checks for users of all ages to access chat features, enabling age-appropriate communication and limiting conversations between adults and minors. These secure age checks are designed to be fast, easy and secure using Facial Age Estimation technology directly within the app.

Once age-checked, users are assigned to one of six age groups: under 9, 9-12, 13-15, 16-17, 18-20 or 21 and older, ensuring conversations are safe and age appropriate.

Age checks are optional; however, features like chat will not be accessible unless an age check is completed. Chat is also turned off by default for children under age 9, unless a parent provides consent after an age check.



MATHIAS BISHOP

Over 70 youth and young adults gathered at the Cary Arts Center for the Second Annual Youth Advocacy Summit for a half-day of interactive workshops which included leadership skills, civic engagement through art, STEM, dance and yoga.

MOVERS AND SHAKERS

CHARTER SCHOOL

Maureen Joy Charter School has named Daniel Kelvin Bullock as its new executive director. Bullock has over 20 years of education experience. Maureen Joy serves students in grades K-8.



Bullock

Are you or someone you know a Mover and a Shaker? Drop us a line at [Movers and Shakers, c/o The Triangle Tribune, 5007 Southpark Drive, Suite 200-G, Durham, NC 27713, or email us at info@triangletribune.com.](mailto:info@triangletribune.com) Photos welcome.



MyFriendBen connects NC families with public benefits

By Eric Tegethoff
 PUBLIC NEWS SERVICE

A tool in North Carolina is connecting people with the public benefits they may not know they're eligible for.

MyFriendBen NC was developed by nonprofit Code the Dream. Its co-executive director, Dan Rearick, said \$80 billion in benefits go unclaimed by eligible families each year.

To use the tool, Rearick said, people only need to input basic information such as their family's income and household expenses.

"MyFriendBen NC is a free, one-stop benefits eligibility screener," he said. "It take six minutes and

doesn't require any personal information. At the end, you get a personalized report outlining the benefits you're likely eligible for and how much they could mean to your family specifically."

Rearick said the tool is designed for anyone and could be especially beneficial for parents and older adults. MyFriendBen identifies state and federal benefits and tax credits.

Rearick said the first 20,000 people to use it found an average of \$2,000 per month in eligible assistance for their families. He said the number of benefits available can be overwhelming for some, and this tool has changed their money situation.

"Many of them have just come back to us and said that it's a lifesaver," he said. "It's the first time that they've been able to cover their medical bills, for example."

Rearick said public benefits are crucial for many families, adding that if benefits programs were fully funded and families received all of the benefits they're eligible for, child poverty could be cut in half.

"It's really not just about those short-term needs," he said. "The evidence shows that families who are able to access these benefits end up with better education outcomes and better jobs moving forward."

Girls take the court for sports, wellness and confidence at Clubhouse



JAYLIN POWELL

Boys & Girls Clubs of America and the Buffalo Wild Wings Foundation hosted a high-energy sports and wellness event for nearly 200 girls from Boys & Girls Clubs of Wake and Johnston Counties. The event featured rotating activities designed to build confidence, teamwork and healthy lifestyles, including Zumba, yoga, basketball, flag football, volleyball and a Girls in Sports empowerment art project and photo booth. It was held at Raleigh Girls Club of Wake County.

BUSINESS BRIEFS

MARKETS:

* Sacred Source Holistic Market is March 15, 2-7 p.m., Durham Central Park, 501 Foster St.

TOUR

The next Durham Business Listening Tour is March 17, 4 p.m., North Regional Library, 221 Milton Road.

SOCIAL

Greater Chapel Hill-Carrboro Chamber's Women's Seminar & Social - Winter 2026 is March 18, 4 to 7 p.m., Graduate Chapel Hill, 311 W. Franklin St. Visit business.carolinachamber.org.

NETWORKING

North Raleigh Chamber's March Business After Hours is March 25, 5-7

p.m., SERVPRO, 5604 Departure Drive. Register: northraleighchamber.org.

MARKET

Women's Maker Market pop-up is March 28, noon to 3 p.m., Transfer Food Hall, 500 E. Davie St. Visit www.grlmarket.com.

Send business briefs to info@triangletribune.com.

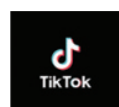
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