

SPORTS

Hillside High and the Durham community loses a legend



COMMUNITY FOCUS

Meet the owner of SoulFire Kitchen in Durham

The Triangle Tribune

THE TRIANGLE'S CHOICE FOR THE BLACK VOICE SINCE 1998

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VOLUME 27 NO. 48

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MILKEN EDUCATOR AWARD WINNER

Pittsboro Elementary schoolteacher Shane Henderson was surprised last week with a \$25,000 Milken Educator Award for being voted the top educator in North Carolina.



MILKEN FAMILY FOUNDATION



St. Aug's contacts Trump administration on higher ed compact

HIGHER EDUCATION

RALEIGH - Saint Augustine's University has expressed interest in signing the Trump administration's higher ed compact, Fox News reported, joining New College of Florida and Valley Forge Military College.

However, interim president Verjanis Peoples and board chair Sophie Gibson wrote in a letter to the Education Department that several provisions of the proposed compact are not "compatible with the statutory mission and federal mandate under which HBCUs operate."

Those include restrictions on the use of race in admissions or for financial support.

"As noted in our institutional analysis, such provisions would unintentionally force HBCUs to choose between compliance and survival, a position that is neither feasible nor consistent with congressional intent," wrote Peoples and Gibson in a letter posted by Fox News.

Other requirements that raise concerns include a cap on international students and a five-year tuition freeze. "Without mission-sensitive accommodations,

these sections risk unintended consequences that would impede our ability to serve students effectively," they added.

Saint Augustine's has struggled in recent years amid declining enrollment and financial challenges. The university had 175 students as of October 2024, more recent enrollment figures aren't available. Late last year, St. Aug's lost its accreditation, though a federal court overturned that decision. Classes were held online this fall.

Please see **ST. AUG/2A**



KYLIE MARSH

Students perform an Aztec dance at CCB Plaza

Durham Public Schools students stage walkout to protest ICE

By Kylie Marsh

Kylie.marsh@triangletribune.com

DURHAM - Durham Public Schools classrooms were sparsely filled last Friday as students organized a walk-out in rapid response to U.S. Customs and Border Patrol's descent upon the city.

CBP agents moved to the Triangle last week following their blitz on Charlotte. About 29% of DPS students were absent last week, Durham Public Schools Superintendent Anthony Lewis said.

Magaly, who didn't want to give her last name due to fear of being targeted by authorities, is a junior at Hillside High school. She spoke with her teachers about wanting to call a protest and was motivated to organize one by their responses.

"I don't think it's right how people's families are being broken apart," she said. The next day, Magaly said "almost the whole school" walked out in support, chanting and holding banners and signs. For almost an hour, students marched a lap around the school during the third period. Afterwards, they returned to class in high spirits.

"Everyone was in a good mood," Magaly said. As to why the federal crackdown is happening, Magaly said she thinks there are misconceptions about her community.

"Maybe they think colored people might have criminal records or be violent," she said. "They think they're helping the community." Magaly connected with other students across Durham Public Schools to plan an even bigger, multischool protest on Friday.

"Most colored people came here to do better for their families and their kids," she said. "Now they're scared to go to work or even go out to buy groceries."

On Friday afternoon, an estimated 250 people gathered at CCB Plaza in downtown Durham. JD Clement Early College senior Bryant Casarrubias said he and other student organizers decided to launch the youth grassroots group, Youth Against Ice.

Please see **DPS/2A**

Black community straddles divide over immigration crisis

By Greg Childress

NC NEWSLINE

Across North Carolina last week, President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown resulted in the arrests of more than 300 people that federal officials claim are in the country illegally.

That's created a dilemma for some members of the Black community: Should they actively join protests against the

crackdown or sit this one out?

William Dickens, a member of the Raleigh chapter of American Descendants of Slavery, doesn't think Black people should get involved. Dickens said he doesn't recall Latinos supporting Black people during their struggles.

"People just try to turn us into the mule for everybody, while at the same time, we're suffering, we're drowning," said Dickens

who wasn't speaking for the organization. "Who's supporting us?"

Dickens noted Trump made gains with Latino voters in the 2024 presidential election. According to the Pew Research Center, Trump garnered 48% of the Latino vote compared to Kamala Harris' 51% share. Trump won 36% of the Latino vote in the 2020 presidential election.

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St. Aug’s contacts Trump administration on compact

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The 158-year-old university is the first HBCU to show interest in the compact, which would require colleges to make a number of changes to their policies and practices in exchange for potential benefits such as an edge in federal grant competitions.

The Trump administration first invited nine universities to give feedback on the document, and none in the group decided to sign on.

Since the proposal was

made public in early October, several universities have rejected it, arguing the federal funding should be based on merit, not adherence to a president's priorities.

The administration has initially aimed to finalize the compact by Nov. 21, but that deadline has reportedly been extended.

Peoples and Gibson wrote that they support the compact's goal to strengthen academic excellence, accountability and transparency in higher ed,

and they see alignment between St. Augustine's historic mission and the administration's proposal.

Despite their other reservations, "Saint Augustine's University remains eager to participate as a constructive partner and early-engagement institution," they wrote.

They asked the department to work with HBCUs to shape a final agreement that upholds "both the letter and spirit of the Compact while safeguarding our statutory purpose."

SPONSORED CONTENT



Turn Over a New Financial Leaf this Fall: Strategies for Credit Score Success

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As the days grow shorter and autumn settles in, it's a good time to shine a light on a topic that can feel mysterious: your credit score. For many, credit can feel confusing or even intimidating but understanding how it works and why it matters can be an important step toward strengthening your financial health journey.

How Your Credit Score Impacts Your Financial Journey

Your credit score is a three-digit number used by lenders, landlords, insurance companies, mobile phone providers, and financial institutions to assess your reliability. A higher score can help you qualify for lower interest rates and better loan terms, saving you money in interest and making it easier to achieve major financial goals such as buying a home or car.

Establishing good credit means building a record of responsible usage. Using your credit card and paying your bill on time demonstrates financial responsibility to lenders. On the other hand, missing payment deadlines or not meeting the minimum amount due can negatively impact your score.

Understanding the Factors Behind Your Credit Score

Credit scores typically range from 300 to 850.

The better your score, the more options you may have with lenders. Here's what usually influences your score:

- **Payment History:** Consistently paying bills on time has a positive impact, while late or missed payments can lower your score.
- **Credit Utilization:** Using a smaller portion of your total available credit is better for your score; high balances relative to your total credit limits can be a negative factor.
- **Total Debt:** Lower overall debt is viewed more favorably, while carrying high debt can reduce your score.
- **Types of Credit Accounts:** Having a mix of credit accounts, such as credit cards, auto loans, and mortgages, can strengthen your score.
- **Length of Credit History:** A longer track record of responsible credit use contributes positively to your score.
- **Recent Credit Applications:** Applying for new credit can temporarily lower your score.
- **Credit Inquiries:** Soft inquiries, like checking your own credit or receiving pre-approved offers, don't affect your score. Hard inquiries, such as applying for a loan or credit card, may lower your score slightly, but the impact fades over time and drops off your report after two years.

If your credit score is

on the lower end, don't worry—there are steps you can take to help improve it.

Credit Smart Habits

- **Pay your bills on time.** Payment history is an important factor when it comes to calculating your credit score. If you struggle with meeting payment deadlines, consider setting reminders or enrolling in autopay.
- **Pay down your debt.** Your credit utilization—meaning the size of your card balance—is the second biggest factor in most credit scoring models. Create a plan to pay down high-interest debt first.
- **Monitor your credit with Chase Credit Journey®.** Regularly checking your credit report can help you spot areas of improvement and fix errors. Chase Credit Journey is a free tool that lets you monitor your score without impacting it and provides alerts if your personal information is exposed in a data breach. It's free for everyone, no Chase account required.

Turning Credit Concerns into Financial Wins

Building credit doesn't have to be spooky and mysterious. With patience and smart financial habits, you can improve your score and unlock financial opportunities. This fall, take steps to understand and strengthen your credit.



GALLEN BACHARIE/NC NEWSLINE

Several hundred gathered at Moore Square in downtown Raleigh to protest ongoing ICE and U.S. Border Patrol raids.

Black community divided over immigration crisis

Continued from page 1A

"They [Latinos] voted for him and now they get what they get," Dickens said, a sentiment also shared by other Black people across various social media platforms.

But other Black people see Latinos as allies who must be supported. In Durham, for example, the Union of Southern Service Workers has been a staunch supporter of Latino causes and present at recent immigration protests.

"In the Union of Southern Service Workers, we know that joy and solidarity is the best antidote against fear and division," Mama Cookie Bradley, a union member, said in a statement. "We stand united with working people and communities across North Carolina in declaring that there is absolutely no

emergency that justifies the presence of federal immigration forces in Durham."

Jovita Lee, the program director for the NC Black Alliance, said whether Black people know it or not, they should be concerned about what's happening to Latinos in North Carolina and across the country. The Alliance is opposed to federal immigration agents being in North Carolina as part of Trump's mass deportation efforts, Lee said.

"I won't decide if folks are right or wrong in regard to their personal opinion [about immigration], but I will speak to fact – and the fact of the matter is these practices are indeed harming both brown communities and Black communities," Lee said.

She compared immigration agents to "slave patrols" in the antebellum

South that had the authority to stop and question enslaved people and to search homes without warrants.

"This narrative around that it has nothing to do with us, I would disagree with," Lee said. "The discriminatory practices and the racism that it is rooted in is very reminiscent of what we saw in our own history."

Some African Americans are likely sitting out protests out of concern about the current political climate, Lee said.

And historically, African Americans and Black immigrants have viewed immigration differently, she said.

"I think all of that is kind of influencing that opinion that some Black Americans may have when it comes to immigration not being a topic they want to engage or talk about," Lee said.



Trump administration’s new moves to dismantle Education Department

By Cory Turner
WUNC

The Trump administration unveiled a sweeping plan Tuesday to sidestep Congress and outsource large pieces of the U.S. Department of Education, telling lawmakers and staff that it would shift work dedicated to, among other things, elementary and secondary education, post-secondary education and Indian education to other federal agencies.

All three of those offices were originally placed at the department by Congress when it created the agency in 1979, and these moves are being made without Congress' consent.

According to two people who were briefed on the plan by the administration, and who asked not to be named for fear of retribution, the administration has forged six new agreements between the Education Department and other agencies, offloading day-to-day operations of congressionally-required programs while retaining a small contingent of staff at the department.

For example, under these new agreements, much of the work of the Office of Elementary and Secondary

Education, which includes managing Title I, a key federal funding stream that helps schools support low-income students, would shift to the U.S. Department of Labor, as would much of the work of the Office of Postsecondary Education. The U.S. Department of the Interior would take on much of the work of the department's Office of Indian Education. The U.S. Department of State would take on international education and foreign language studies programming.

Responsibility for the Child Care Access Means Parents in School Program, which offers child care on college campuses to low-income student-parents, would move to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

In a USA Today op-ed published Sunday, Education Secretary Linda McMahon wrote of this kind of agreement: "We'll peel back the layers of federal bureaucracy by partnering with agencies that are better suited to manage programs and empowering states and local leaders to oversee the rest. These partnerships are commonplace across the federal government to improve

service delivery and increase efficiency."

In July, the Education Department announced one such agreement with the Labor Department, in which Labor took on responsibility for adult education and family literacy programs previously administered by the Education Department, though an Education Department release insisted, "The programs will be managed alongside [Education Department] staff, with continued leadership and oversight by [the Education Department]."

Tuesday's agreements do not include a handful of the department's signature responsibilities, including special education, student civil rights enforcement and student loans.

Opponents of the administration's move say, given that Congress created these offices and explicitly located them inside the Education Department, the White House cannot legally move their work without Congress' approval.

U.S. Senator Patty Murray, D-Wash., a senior member of the Senate education committee, said in a statement, "This is an out-

Please see **TRUMP/3A**

DPS students stage walkout to protest ICE

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"We couldn't just watch. If no one's going to take action, we have to take action," he said. Casarrubias and his peers witnessed family members being detained, and said people are staying home from work or school for fear of being abducted by state agents.

The gathering at CCB Plaza included signs, flags, speeches, and even students performing a traditional Aztec dance in elaborate regalia.

"It was very vibrant," Casarrubias said. People from all backgrounds came out to show support for the local Latino and immigrant communities. "We all shared a common goal of uniting and fighting for what we believe was right."

The students coordinated using a group chat and through common connections were able to widely publicize the walkout. Groups like the Durham Workers Assembly and the Party for Socialism and Liberation posted the flyer on Instagram. Through a group of over 150 people, community members leveraged their connections for the event.

"It was mainly just people knowing other people," Casarrubias explained. "There's power in numbers."

OPINION



The 50-year mortgage is a trap, not a path to Black wealth

By Constance Carter
BLACK PRESS USA

Einstein called compound interest the eighth wonder of the world. Those who understand it earn it. Those who do not pay it.

That is why the Trump administration is floating a 50-year mortgage. It is betting that we will not see the true cost. But let me show you what it really is.

Let's look at the math for a \$420,000 home at 7% interest.

30-year mortgage	
Payment:	\$2,792 per month
Total interest:	\$586,332
50-year mortgage	
Payment:	\$2,527 per month
Total interest:	\$1,095,029

You save about \$265 a month but pay an extra \$508,697 in interest. Half a million dollars.

That's not a discount. It is a trap. Stretching a loan across five decades hands banks hundreds of thousands of dollars that will never circulate through our families or build our wealth. The numbers don't lie.

The median age of a first-time homebuyer in 2025 is 40, according to the National Association of Realtors. If a 40-year-old signs a 50-year mortgage, they will not own their home until they are 90. You will be renting from a bank for half a century. This is not what the 30-year mortgage

was designed to do.

When the 30-year mortgage gained popularity in the 1950s, the average home was priced around \$7,354, and the typical interest rate was about 4%. One income could support a family and pay a mortgage. The mortgage system we are being asked to trust today was never designed with our interests in mind.

From 1934 to the 1960s, the Federal Housing Administration refused to insure mortgages for Black families, calling it an "economically sound" policy. This helped establish the red lines on maps that labeled Black neighborhoods as "too risky." Even Black veterans who served in World War II were denied access to GI Bill home loans that helped white families build generational wealth.

Black families were just as qualified to buy those affordable homes but were denied access. White families purchased homes for \$7,000 in the 1950s that are now worth \$300,000 to \$400,000. That appreciation built the white middle class. Black families were locked out by design.

If they move forward with the 50-year mortgage plan, working-class Black families in particular will feel the impact first, depleting the wealth we have accumulated despite all the barriers we've faced. Prices are high. Rates are high. Affordability is at its

lowest point in decades. We need two incomes, side hustles, credit stacking, and divine intervention to compete with institutional investors and inflated housing prices.

A 50-year mortgage does not solve this. It expands the burden by creating the illusion of affordability and traps people in a cycle of debt for life.

Think about retirement. The average Social Security check is about \$1,900 a month. Even if the program still exists in its current form by the time today's buyers reach retirement age, how will they manage a \$2,500 to \$3,000 mortgage and still afford food, medicine and basic living costs?

A 50-year mortgage pushes Black homeowners into a future where retirement is impossible, which is its own form of bondage. Bondage is debt you cannot escape. Bondage is owing a bank money until the day you die.

Do not make decisions today that will bankrupt your future. Before you sign a 50-year mortgage, ask yourself:

Will I still be paying this when I am supposed to be retired?

Will this help me build equity or delay it?

Will this protect or drain my family's wealth?

A mortgage should be a path to ownership. We cannot build generational wealth on a foundation of generational debt.

No. 1 new release sets the agenda for Black America

BLACK PR WIRE

CHICAGO — A movement has been born. The new book, "Project 2030: The Agenda for Black America" has soared on Amazon, marking the emergence of a new national conversation and a new blueprint for Black America's future.

In an era defined by competing visions for the nation's soul, "Project 2030" stands as a people's plan for progress, designed to transform protest into policy and aspiration into measurable action.

Authored by award-winning media executive Sean T. Long, with contributions from civic leaders Denise Smith, the Rev. Johnny Sellers, Shara Morrow, Stephanie Yarborough, Gloria Cooper Blue and Anthony Clausen Jackson, and featuring a foreword by Clayton Harris III, "Project 2030" is more than a book; it's a national call to action.

Two Blueprints. Two Americas.

At a time when initiatives like Project 2025 seek to roll back decades of progress by dismantling diversity programs, weakening civil rights enforcement and centralizing political control, "Project 2030"



Sean T. Long

stands in sharp contrast. Where Project 2025 looks backward, rooted in fear and exclusion, "Project 2030" looks forward, rooted in justice, ownership and opportunity.

It is a blueprint written not behind closed doors but from the block up — crafted by community leaders, educators, entrepreneurs and faith voices who refuse to surrender the future of Black America to political regression.

"Project 2030" isn't just responding to an agenda, it's rewriting it," Long said. "We can no longer afford to wait for permission to build progress. The power has always been within our communities; this book shows how to organize it, measure it and scale it."

The movement extends beyond the pages. The companion website, OurProject2030.com, functions as a digital organizing hub, offering tools like the Project 2030 Action Lab, neighborhood block club templates, and a forthcoming Equity Scorecard to help local leaders

turn ideas into data-driven impact.

Faith leaders, educators and activists across the country are already mobilizing around the framework, hosting 2030 Talks, forming community advisory boards, and using the book's six pillars — economic empowerment, educational equity, health justice, criminal justice reform, political power, and technological access — as their blueprint for change.

By 2030, the goal is to see measurable progress across economic ownership, academic achievement, health care access, civic representation and tech inclusion in Black communities nationwide.

Long is a two-time Emmy Award-winning media executive, author and civic leader based in Chicago. Known for his 30-plus years of impact in television and community development, he has led transformative programs for youth, health and leadership across the Midwest.

Trump's new moves to dismantle Education Dept.

Continued from page 2A

right illegal effort to continue dismantling the Department of Education, and it is students and families who will suffer the consequences as key programs that help students learn to read or that strengthen ties between schools and families are

spun off to agencies with little to no relevant expertise and are gravely weakened, or even completely broken, in the process."

In briefing lawmakers and staff, the department insisted that these programs' statutory responsibilities would remain at the department, even if the work would be done else-

where.

It's unclear if retaining a modicum of department staff, in partnership with other agencies, will be enough to convince the courts the administration is following federal law.

There will likely be legal challenges opposing Tuesday's moves.



Breaking down Durham's barriers to homeownership

Despite Durham's prosperity, too many families remain locked out of homeownership.

The challenges go beyond personal budgeting or credit scores, they are systemic barriers entrenched in our housing market.

In Durham County today, roughly 39,000 households, out of 122,000, cannot afford their current housing. That means nearly 1 in 3 families is living cost-burdened, paying over 30% of income for shelter.

These costs burdens hit minority communities hardest and are driving a silent crisis of displacement and distress.

One major barrier is cash, not credit. Many low-income families do qualify for 30-year fixed mortgages; their incomes and credit scores meet lending criteria. The deal-breaker is the upfront cash needed: the down payments, closing costs, and mortgage insurance. In today's market, these upfront costs have become "the new barriers" to entry.

According to the North Carolina Housing Finance Agency, Durham's housing stock is so tight that buyers effectively need a 20% down payment to win a home — far above the typical 5% that suffices elsewhere. Nationally, the median loan-to-value for first mortgages is 95%, reflecting that most buyers put only 5% down. But in Durham, competition and low inventory mean cash offers and big down payments rule the day. For a

\$300,000 starter home, 20% is \$60,000 — an insurmountable sum for working-class families. They aren't losing out because of poor credit or irresponsible spending; they're losing because they lack generational wealth or sizable savings. Credit readiness isn't the issue, the lack of down payment assistance is.

Homeownership rates in Durham County reveal a stark racial gap: only 47% of Black households own homes, compared to 75% of white households. This 28-point disparity underscores the systemic inequities in mortgage access and wealth.

Compounding this is a legacy of racial disparity in mortgage access. Durham's homeownership rates lay this bare: only 47% of Black households own their homes, versus 75% of white households — a 28-point racial gap. This gap isn't simply the product of individual choices; it reflects decades of discrimination, lower appraisals in communities of color, and fewer family assets to draw on for down payments. Even at equal incomes, Black borrowers on average receive smaller loans and higher interest rates, or they shy away from the process entirely after generations of redlining-induced distrust.

As Habitat for Humanity of Durham's CEO, and as a Black woman who grew up in North Carolina, I know these hurdles are not hypothetical. They are the stories I hear daily: families

with stable jobs and good credit denied the chance to buy because they can't amass a huge lump sum or because they encounter subtle biases in underwriting.

Durham's working families are also being squeezed by rising costs and an alarming uptick in foreclosures. Over 31% of all Durham households are cost-burdened by housing. Among renters, nearly half spend over a third of income on rent, and for homeowners the figure is about 18%.

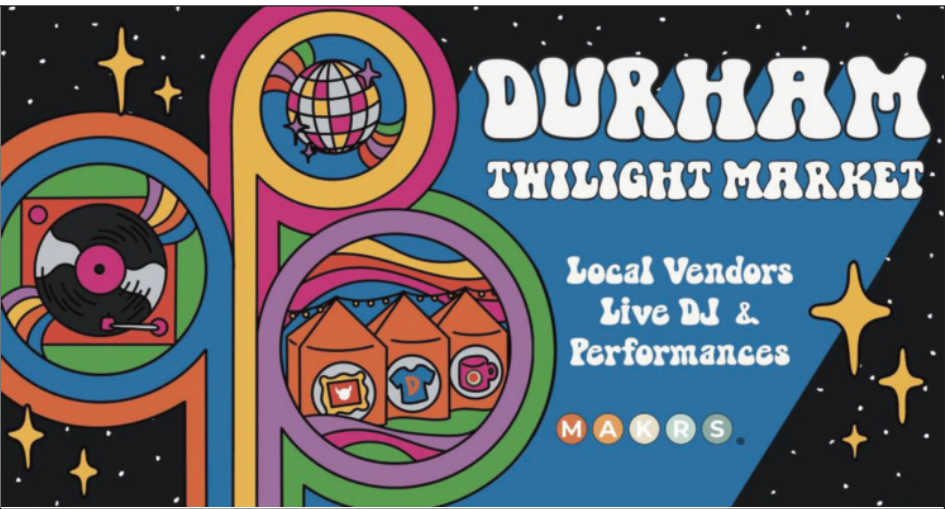
When any unexpected expense or rate hike hits, these families have no wiggle room. The result? Some lose the very homes they fought so hard to attain.

In Durham County, 254 families faced a foreclosure in the past year. Many of those homeowners fall in the 30% to 50% of Area Median Income range — folks who earn too much to qualify for a lot of aid, but far too little to absorb rising taxes, insurance and adjustable mortgage rates.

We're seeing this especially in our historically Black neighborhoods: elders on fixed incomes or modest pay are getting squeezed by higher costs and are at risk of losing homes that have been in their family for generations. It's a cruel irony that even as housing values climb, the people who most need the stability of homeownership are struggling to hang on.

Read the entire article on our website.

BUSINESS BRIEFS



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Give It To The People's Workforce In Action Business Luncheon is Dec. 5, 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., 1121 Slater Road, Durham. Register: www.eventbrite.com.

FEST
MAKRS annual Holiday Fest is Dec. 6, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., Raleigh City Plaza. Visit makrs.com/.

MARKET
Jolly Raleigh Holiday Market at Iron Works is Dec. 6, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., 2200 Atlantic Ave.

MARKET
The next Durham Twilight Market is Dec. 6, 5:30-9:30 p.m., 800 Taylor St.

CHAMBER
The Men of Southeast Raleigh and The Black Chamber of Raleigh pres-

ent Southeast Raleigh Legacy Gala Dec. 14, 6-10 p.m., 3511 Maitland Drive. Tickets: eventbrite.com.

OPENINGS:
* The Up Down Market launches Dec. 13, 2-6 p.m., at GeerHouse, 620 Foster St. The event is free but registration required at www.eventbrite.com.

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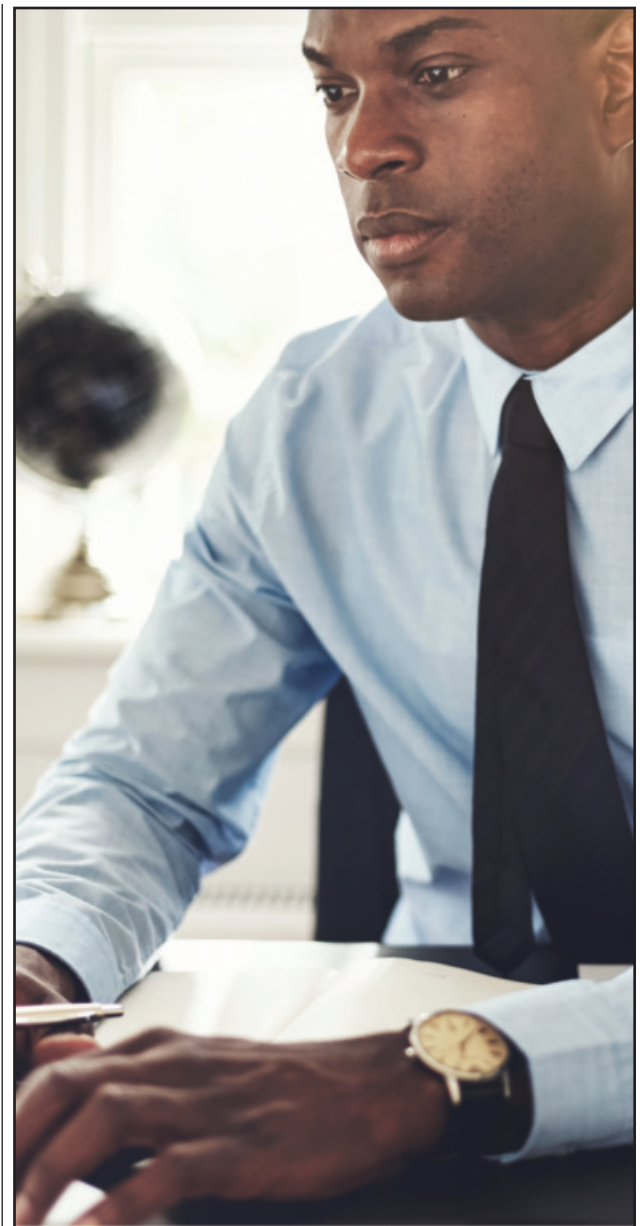
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The porn crisis hiding in today’s churches

By Rev. Dorothy S. Boulware

WORD IN BLACK

People of faith often live under a magnifying glass. A public declaration of belief can feel like an invitation for constant scrutiny, where even the smallest slip becomes proof of hypocrisy, especially in an era of social media and cancel culture.

Every misstep is amplified, judged and turned into a spectacle.

That pressure helps explain why pornography use among Christians remains so hidden, even as new research shows it's widespread. Christians admittedly participating in pornography is just such a chink in our collective Christian armor, according to ongoing research, and remains a growing problem.

"Today, 3 in 5 U.S. adults report viewing pornography, and half of those who use porn say no one knows. 84% percent of them say they don't have anyone in their life helping them avoid pornography."

The ripple effects of pornography include a notable decline in mental health and well-being.

Meanwhile, 44% of U.S. adults believe "watching pornography has little impact on the other aspects of an individual's life," according to a recent report, "Beyond the Porn Phenomenon," produced by Pure Desire Ministries.

It specifies that while pornography is more prevalent among men and non-Christians, a significant number of women and

Christians also participate. While men tend to have a more positive view of porn use and minimize its effects, women generally see its use and effects more negatively.

Helping people find their way back from this addiction is the work of Pure Desire Ministries and Ashley Jameson, a prime facilitator of that restoration.

"I write, I teach, I train church leaders, and I have my own story with struggle, love, sex, addiction and betrayal," she tells Word in Black. And it's a story she shares around the world. "I think we have groups in 27 different countries."

She says research shows that a particular addiction doesn't escape anyone. "It doesn't matter your color, socioeconomic status.

It's impacting people everywhere at a high rate. As far as healing and recovery, ministries from my own experience are in greater numbers in predominantly white churches."

One of the things that has shocked her while training for this job is the physical effect on the brain.

"It physically puts holes and atrophies your brain. On brain scans, researchers see a brain using pornography compared to a brain on heroin, and they look the same, if not worse. It's actually atrophied," she says.

"It helped me understand that when we're operating in this way, we're actually functioning with broken brains. We can now see that our behaviors can change the way our DNA sends messages and set up our children and grandchildren to struggle, which is why I

see generational curses play a part in this and our generational history."

Pure Desire's website offers a plethora of resources for sheer information, multiple groups to suit every situation and further options of all kinds.

For clarity, Jameson described the addiction or struggle as "something that's been going on a while, something you said you wouldn't return to but find yourself repeatedly returning, even if there are long gaps in time. Is it hurting you or others?"

Pure Desire's figures come from its partnership with Barna, which reports that the Christians surveyed, 75% admit to using pornography, and it doesn't matter if they're in church or out.

And 67% of pastors admit to using it "And those are our leaders. And this is why it's hard to talk about in the church. Because we don't know where to get help without being removed from our roles. And we need to have availability for people to get help with this without automatically being removed."

She says those affected should just trust the process, especially those in a secret struggle, and remember, "we can really only take our kids as far as we've gone. And so, the same struggles that we have, just like the Bible tells us, our kids will likely struggle with if we don't have the courage to step out and make those changes so that we can help our kids or grandkids."



FILE PHOTO

A healthy lifestyle can help offset ovarian cancer risk.

Five ways to decrease ovarian cancer risk

BLACKDOCTOR.ORG

Ovarian cancer ranks fifth in cancer deaths among women. This accounts for more deaths than any other cancer of the female reproductive system.

It's important to know how to recognize the symptoms and when to call the doctor.

There has been a lot of research on several risk factors that will increase women's chances of developing epithelial ovarian cancer. Here are five simple ways to decrease your risk.

*** Family history:** Women with a mother, sister, grandmother or aunt who has had ovarian cancer have a higher risk of developing the disease. Therefore, it is important to have regular gynecology visits and have annual pap smears.

*** Obesity:** Obesity has been connected to the risk of many cancers but more commonly ovarian cancer. It's not exactly clear as to why, but a body mass index of at least 30 puts you at risk for an aggressive kind of ovarian cancer. The best practice you can

do is to have normal body weight and to make sure you're eating a healthy diet.

*** Estrogen hormone replacement therapy:** Long-term use of HRT can increase your risk of Ovarian cancer. There are many research studies that show the link of HRT and ovarian cancer. The American Cancer Society says if 1,000 women 50 years old took hormones for menopause for 5 years, one extra ovarian cancer could develop.

*** Smoking and alcohol use:** Smoking and alcohol always increase your risk for any kind of cancer. But they are not directly associated with ovarian cancer. However, decreasing your intake of alcohol and putting down the cigarettes will decrease your risk of cancer and many other illnesses.

*** Talcum powder:** It's believed that using talcum powder on a sanitary napkin can cause particles to travel through to the vagina, uterus and fallopian tubes to the ovary. Thousands of consumers have filed lawsuits against Johnson & Johnson and other manufacturers,

claiming the longtime use of their baby powder products resulted in an ovarian cancer diagnosis.

SYMPTOMS OF OVARIAN CANCER

Ovarian cancer can be difficult to detect in the early stages. This is partly because the ovaries - two small, almond-shaped organs on both sides of the uterus - are deep within the abdominal cavity.

Here are some symptoms to be aware of:

- * Bloating
- * Pelvic or abdominal pain
- * Trouble eating or feeling full quickly
- * Feeling the need to urinate urgently or often
- * Pain during sex
- * Fatigue
- * Constipation or menstrual changes

Diet, exercise, rest and laxatives can help. If symptoms are persistent, consult with a doctor. Unfortunately, symptoms typically occur in advanced stages. It happens when tumor growth creates pressure on the bladder and rectum, and fluid begins to form.

Remember to get frequent checkups and follow up with your doctor.

Attorney warns young North Carolinians of internship red flags

STAFF REPORTS

As thousands of students and recent grads across North Carolina take on summer internships, nationally recognized attorney Brian Chase of Bisnar Chase is sounding the alarm: some internships aren't steppingstones, they're legal minefields in disguise.

"Interns are often told to be grateful for the experience," says Chase, "but too often, they're delivering real value to a company and getting nothing in return - not even proper training. That's not an internship. That's exploitation."

Internships have long been considered a rite of passage for young professionals, especially in competitive industries. But the rise of unpaid or vaguely defined roles has raised concerns - not just among career advisers but legal experts, too.

"In the eyes of the law, there's a difference between shadowing a team and becoming a free extension of it," Chase explains. "If you're generating content, managing client accounts or working unsupervised on high-stakes tasks, you're not interning,

you're working."

5 Red Flags That Could Signal a Problem

To help North Carolina students avoid legal and ethical pitfalls, Chase is highlighting five key red flags to watch for before accepting - or continuing - a summer internship:

*** No clear job description:** A legitimate internship should have a defined learning plan. If you're told to "wear many hats" or "figure it out as you go," beware.

*** Unpaid with no structured learning:** Labor laws allow unpaid internships only under specific conditions, including that the experience benefits the intern more than the employer. If you're doing repetitive, menial work or lack mentorship, that balance is likely off.

*** You're doing the job of a regular employee:** Interns can support teams, not replace them. If you're writing proposals, handling customers or being left in charge, it's not legal unless you're paid.

*** Lack of mentorship or real guidance:** If no one's checking in on your progress or offering feedback, that's a problem. Interns should have someone to turn to, ask questions and

learn from. Being left to "figure it out" might sound empowering, but it usually means the company isn't invested in your development.

*** Unreasonable time demands or vague promises:** Being asked to stay late, work weekends or put in extra hours to "prove yourself" can be a sign that the role is more about filling gaps than supporting your growth. If you're working like a full-time employee without the pay - or a clear path to something more - it's worth reconsidering the arrangement.

Chase emphasizes that not all internships are bad. Many offer critical experience, connections and mentorship. "We don't want to scare students away from internships altogether," he says. "But we do want to empower them to ask the right questions and recognize when something feels off."

If you're in an internship that seems questionable, Chase recommends documenting everything: dates, tasks, communications and expectations. "Interns often feel powerless, but they do have rights, especially if the company is benefiting significantly from their work."

AROUND THE TRIANGLE

RALEIGH OPEN HOUSES:

* Southeast Raleigh Assembly's open house for members is Dec. 1, 3-5 p.m., 1425 Promise Beacon Circle, Suite 214.

* The Women's Center's Open House and Media Day Dec. 2, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., 2200 New Bern Avenue.

GALA

Inaugural HBCU Holiday Gala is Dec. 5, 6-11 p.m., Hilton Raleigh North Hills, 3415 Wake Forest Road. Tickets: www.eventbrite.com.

SHAW

Shaw University's HBCU Triumph Gala is Dec. 6, 7 p.m., The Westin Hotel-RDU, 3931 Macaw St. Tickets: triumphgala@shawu.edu.

VETERANS

The next Veterans and Coffee is Dec. 9, 10:30-11:30 a.m., John "Top" Green African American Cultural Center, 401 MLK Jr. Boulevard.

DURHAM NAACP

NAACP Durham Branch Annual Freedom Fund Luncheon is Nov. 30, 2 p.m., Durham Hilton, 3800 Hillsborough Road. Tickets: www.durhamnaACP.org.

BREAKFAST

Siegal Pancake Breakfast is Nov. 30, 9 a.m., Beth El Synagogue, 1004 Watts St. RSVP on website.

CONVERSATION

A Family Conversation on the life of Pfc. Booker T. Spicely is Dec. 1, 6 p.m., Durham Main Library, 300 N. Roxboro St.

OPEN HOUSE

Hayti Heritage Center will hold an open house Dec. 2, noon to 6 p.m., 804 Old Fayetteville St.

ROUNDTABLE

The next Community Luncheon Roundtable is Dec. 4, noon, Elizabeth Street UMC Fellowship Hall. Open to the public.

FUNDRAISER

A barbecue chicken and ribs fundraiser is Dec. 5, 11 a.m., Ledge Rock Missionary Baptist, 4300 Durham Road. Hwy 98. Preorder at havemoore.com.

LIGHTING

Downtown Durham Christmas tree lighting has been rescheduled to Dec. 6, 4-7 p.m., CCB Plaza.

HOLIDAY

Durham Fire Department's Toys and Books for Rides is Dec. 7, noon to 4 p.m., Durham Central Park.

CHAPEL HILL THEATRE

Actor Mike Wiley will perform "The Fire of Freedom" Dec. 5, 6 p.m., Kenan Theatre on UNC's campus. Register: https://www.chapelhill-publiclibrary.org.

CRAFT SHOW

Christmas Holiday Shoppe Craft Show is Dec. 6, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., St. Thomas More Catholic Church, 940 Carmichael St.

HU's Nile Miller: Grind and Grit



By Ron Knox
HOWARD ATHLETICS
Nothing was ever handed to Nile Miller.

She built her reputation the long way — through late-night workouts, quiet persistence and a grind that did not need an audience. When most players were fielding calls from coaches, Miller and her mom were the ones sending the emails, attaching homemade highlight videos to anyone who might take a look.

Now, the 6-foot-1 Howard senior forward moves like someone who earned everything. She is light on her feet and explosive off of them — swatting shots, soaring above crowds for rebounds and scoring with a feathery touch that softens her power.

The results mean more because of where she started. From overlooked recruit to indispensable piece of Howard's machine and the backbone of its blue-ribbon defense, Miller carries the quiet satisfaction of someone who climbed every rung herself, and never stopped rising. She is still soaring, leading, laughing and savoring every moment of Howard's terrific start to the season.

Miller has been a major part of the Bison's early success, averaging 7.5 points, 5.5 rebounds and 1 block per game. She scored a season-high 11 points in a 62-60 win over George Washington.

"I'm very grateful to be here," Miller said. "When you go to college, you have got to kind of fit in, where you fit in. I obviously was not as efficient at scoring as everybody else, so I just started putting more effort into defense and found what I was good at to get some playing time."

Her turn arrived. The spotlight found her. And now, everybody is praising Miller.

Majoring in sports management, she is having a blast helping Howard's historic start. Miller is more grit than glitter. Her presence alters shots and hinders opponents from finishing cleanly near the basket.

Her quickness and instincts — paired with the towering presence of senior teammate Zennia Thomas (Cleveland) — are big reasons why Howard leads the conference with 34 blocked shots through seven games.

"I feel like everybody just has a different mentality," Miller said. "We are all hungry and we all have faith that we can beat any team. We are not scared of any bigger conferences or what people have to say about other schools or about us. I love (how we are winning so far) because I feel like if one part of our team is lacking, we can pick it up on another part."

Believe it or not, there was a time when Miller was not interested in basketball because she did not like sweating. Miller, who loves doing her hair and sleeping, wanted to do fewer physical activities; however, her dad talked her into playing and the rest is history.

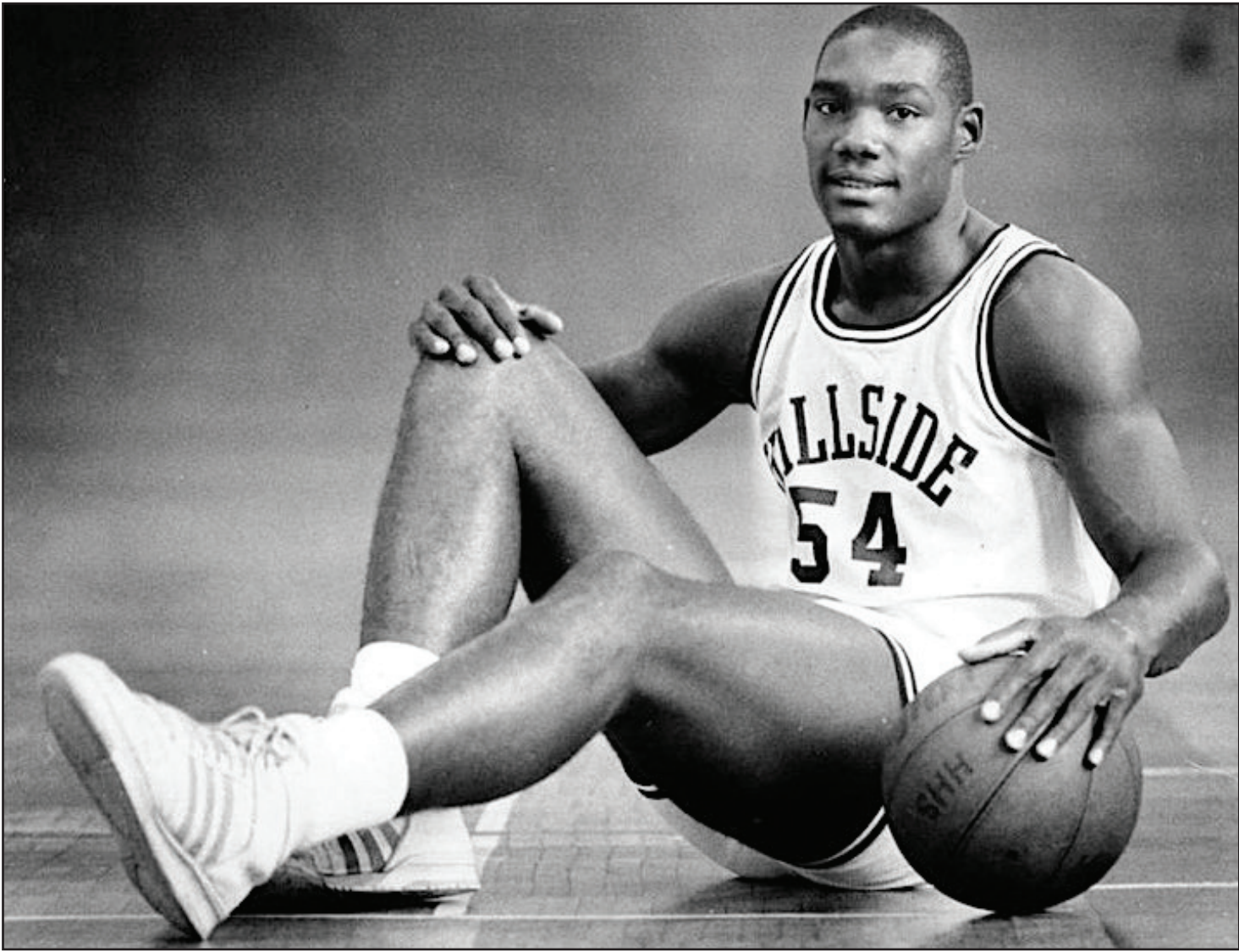
Miller has the rare gift of sweating but remaining cool under pressure. She fixes her hair, smooths her uniform or calmly listens to instructions from head coach Ty Grace. Never flustered.

"My dad forced me to and then I started liking it," she said. "I was just a girly girl and I did not like to sweat."

"... Now, I feel like I have a good connection with my coaches. I have a good connection with the players and the faculty. I love it here."

The Triangle Tribune Sports

November 30 - December 6, 2025 | 6A



COURTESY

Rodney Rogers was a superstar at Wake Forest University and in the NBA for 12 seasons.

Hillside High great Rodney Rogers dies at 54

By Aaron Beard
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Former Wake Forest star and 12-year NBA player Rodney Rogers has died. He was 54.

The school announced Nov. 22 that Rogers had died on Friday. Rogers, the No. 9 overall NBA draft pick in 1993, had been paralyzed from the shoulders down since a dirt bike accident in November 2008. Rogers died of natural causes linked to his spinal cord injury, according to a

statement from the NBA on behalf of Rogers' family.

"The last 17 years have been both challenging and profoundly blessed," the NBPA statement said. "Through every moment, Rodney remained a light — positive, motivated, and full of the quiet strength that inspired everyone around him."

Rogers was the ACC rookie of the year in 1991 and player of the year in 1993 whose No. 54 jersey was retired by the Demon Deacons. The burly 6-foot-7

forward with powerful athleticism earned the "Durham Bull" nickname during his prep career at Hillside High, then went on to score nearly 9,500 points in the NBA while being named league sixth man of the year in 2000.

Rogers' injury led to the establishment of a foundation bearing his name, with Rogers encouraging people with spinal cord injuries while promoting resilience and personal growth in the face of those challenges.

The school honored him with its Distinguished Alumni Award in 2022 along with an honorary degree.

"Rodney is the strongest person I have ever met — physically and mentally — and his resilience was evident in the fight he showed every single day," program great and former teammate Randolph Childress said in a statement released by the school. "I've said this be-

Please see **ROGERS/7A**

HBCU FOOTBALL

S.C. State defends its MEAC title

By Bonitta Best
editor@triangletribune.com

South Carolina State coach Chennis Berry kept his unbeaten MEAC streak alive after winning the conference championship over Delaware State.

Berry is 10-0 in the conference since taking over the job two

seasons ago. Add in his Benedict years, and he's 26-0 in conference games.

The Bulldogs now await the winner of the SWAC Football Championship Dec. 6 between Jackson State and Prairie View A&M. The Panthers have their first nine-game season since 2009 under first-year coach

Tremaine Jackson.

N.C. Central (8-4 overall, 3-2)

The Eagles closed out the season with a 33-14 win at Morgan State.

Redshirt senior quarterback Walker Harris passed for 264 yards to become the program's all-time single-season passer

with 3,214 yards, surpassing Earl Harvey's 3,190 yards in 1985.

NCCU went 5-1 on the road this season and won eight games for the fourth straight year.

Please see **SCSU/7A**

COLLEGE CORNER

Baltimore influencer ambassador of CIAA tourney

Baltimore influencer Pinky Cole Hayes has been named the official ambassador for the CIAA Basketball Tournament in February.

The Baltimore native is owner of the Slutty Vegan restaurant chain and Bar Vegan that has locations in Atlanta, New York City and now Baltimore. She also is a philanthropist committed to uplifting marginalized and underrepresented communities.

"Everything I am started in Baltimore," Hayes said. "This city taught me how to be fearless and independent, to hustle hard and to show up with heart. ...I can't wait to pour that same Baltimore energy into this incredible event."

WOMEN

N.C. Central
Volleyball is going to have

nightmares about Delaware State.

For the fourth straight year, the Eagles lost to DSU in the MEAC Tournament quarterfinals. After barely winning in a set the past three years, NCCU took DSU to five sets and appeared headed to the semifinals. But a Hornets' coaching challenge turned a 15-12 fifth-set win for the Eagles into a 14-13 NCCU lead. DSU then scored the final three points to advance.

Last Thursday certainly wasn't Ladies' Day for the Eagles. After the volleyball heartbreaker, the basketball team rallied from 10 points against undefeated Wake Forest to pull to within two with 18 seconds left. But the team couldn't get a shot off and lost 68-65. Whew! This is why coaches drink -

heavily.

The Eagles (1-4) host arch-rival North Carolina A&T Dec. 2 at 6:30 p.m. The rivalry is back!

Shaw

The Bears lost in three straight sets to Fayetteville State in the CIAA Volleyball Championship. Shaw was seeking a three-peat.

Kya Morris, Khamare Steppe and Kalina Morris were named to the all-tournament team.

In basketball, Shaw heads to Virginia State this weekend to participate in the Conference Challenge. The Bears will play Lincoln (Pa.) and VSU. Then they travel to Norfolk State Dec. 1.



Please see **SLUTTY/7A**

SCSU is the two-time MEAC champion

Continued from page 6A

CIAA
The conference went 0-2 in the Division II playoffs. Johnson C. Smith lost to Frostburg State and Virginia Union lost to California (Pa.). Panthers superstar running back Curtis Allen rushed for 128 yards to finish his record-setting season with 2,409 yards – an average of 200.8 yards per game.

SIAC
The conference went 2-1 in the playoffs. Number 1-seed Albany State defeated Valdosta State in a see-saw thriller. The Rams will face Benedict for the third time this season. The Tigers won a game for the ages, scoring 25 straight points, including a last-second touchdown, to defeat Wingate. Kentucky State ended its historic season with a loss at Newberry.

Scholar-Athlete
Two HBCU student-athletes are among the 13 finalists for the 2025 Doris Robinson Scholar-Athlete Award. The award honors athletes who excel in the field, the classroom and in the community. Doris Robinson was the wife of the late legendary Grambling State coach Eddie Robinson and a longtime



Benedict rallied from 24 points to defeat Wingate.

educator. Morgan State linebacker Erick Hunter has a 3.04 GPA in business administration and volunteers with agencies supporting youth mental health and families experiencing trauma. Jackson State quarterback JaCobian Morgan is pursuing his master's at JSU. He hosts gun violence and youth prevention football camps and volunteers at a local children's hospital. The winner will be announced Dec. 9.

Vacancy
The HBCU openings are now at six after Bowie State coach Kyle Jackson and Hampton coach Trent Boykin were released this week.

Legacy Bowl
The rosters keep filling up for the 2026 Allstate HBCU Legacy Bowl.
* Kentucky State WR Jon McCall
* Savannah State LB Darrian Bell
* Jackson State DL Quincy Ivory
* S.C. State DL Michael Lunz II
* Fayetteville State TE Kahlil Ashley-Diarrah
* Alabama State OL Desmond Daniels
* J.C. Smith WR Deandre Proctor
* Southern TE Dupree Fuller Jr.
* Grambling State DL Warren Robinson
* Fayetteville State LB Matthew Leach

Transfer Portal
* Bowie State's Joseph Towler

Slutty Vegan owner is CIAA ambassador

Continued from page 6A

N.C. Central
The Eagles (2-5) hit a roadblock at Dayton, dropping a 74-55 loss. Khouri Carvey led the team with 15 points and four blocks.

NCCU hosts Carolina U Nov. 29 before heading to James Madison Dec. 3. Then, the rivalry returns when the Aggies come to Durham Dec. 6 at 4 p.m.

Shaw
The Bears had their three-game win streak

broken by Charlotte, 83-79. The good news is it was only an exhibition, so Shaw is still rolling along. The Bears hit the road this weekend for games at Ferrum College and UNC Pembroke. They host Virginia State Dec. 3 in a non-conference matchup.

Hillside High great Rodney Rogers passes

Continued from page 6A
fore, and I still mean it today: he was the best athlete ever to walk onto Wake Forest's campus. He meant so much to so many people, and I feel profoundly blessed to have been with him yesterday."

Rogers played three years at Wake Forest, averaging 21.2 points in the 1992-93 season that saw Wake Forest reach the NCAA Tournament's Sweet 16, before entering the NBA draft as a junior. He started his NBA career with the Denver Nuggets and went on to play with

the Los Angeles Clippers, Phoenix Suns, Boston Celtics, New Jersey Nets, New Orleans Hornets and Philadelphia 76ers.

"It's easy to focus on his extraordinary talent, but what stood out to everyone who knew him was that he was every bit as remarkable as a human being," said Dave Odom, Rogers' coach at Wake Forest. "He loved his teammates, he loved his family, he loved Wake Forest, and he loved the game of basketball. He loved playing for Wake Forest."

"Every time we visited him, I walked away re-

minding myself never to complain — because he never did. He faced life exactly as it came and made the very best of every moment. He was a joy to watch as a basketball player, but he was an even greater man. He shared his strength, his spirit and his life with everyone around him."

According to the NBPA statement, Rogers is survived by wife, Faye; daughters Roddrecka and Rydia; sons Rodney II and Devonte; his mother, Estelle Spencer; and Eric Hipilito, embraced as a son by Rogers.



RECIPE OF THE WEEK

Make bacon cheeseburger popcorn a new tailgating tradition

FAMILY FEATURES

Celebrate Popcorn Popin' Month with a combination of two favorite tailgate foods in this bacon cheeseburger popcorn recipe. It calls for a mixture of spices that mimic the cheeseburger experience, along with hearty bacon and

ground beef for a filling snack that gets you ready for kickoff.

Made by combining cheese popcorn and dill pickle popcorn with hamburger and bacon, along with a dash of spices, it's a perfect game day recipe worth tackling to indulge your family's and friends'

taste buds and elevate your tailgate experience.

Bacon Cheeseburger Popcorn
Recipe courtesy of The Popcorn Board
Prep time: 10 minutes
Cook time: 15 minutes
Servings: 3
Please see **POPCORN/8A**

Reduce, Reuse, Rejoice

5 Holiday Hacks for Eco-Friendly Celebrations

FAMILY FEATURES

Holiday celebrations bring joy, laughter and lasting memories – but they can also leave behind a sleigh full of waste. From food scraps and empty bottles to wrapping paper and decorations, the season can leave your home full of items that could be reused or recycled.

In fact, household waste increases nearly 25% between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day, according to survey results from the Center for Biological Diversity. That's a lot of leftovers, garland and glass that could be kept out of landfills.

To help you cut down on trash and embrace a joyful, less-waste holiday season, the experts at CalRecycle offer these five holiday hacks to help you save cash and protect the planet.

1. Plan Meals to Waste Less and Save More

- Shop your pantry first to avoid buying what you already have.
- Buy only what you need and prepare recipes based on guest count.
- Choose local ingredients from sources like farmers markets that minimize packaging.
- Send guests home with leftovers in reusable containers or freeze extras for future meals.

2. Recycle Food Scraps

- Not all food can be saved, but it doesn't have to go in the trash.
- Compost fruit and vegetable trimmings, eggshells, coffee grounds and plate scrapings. Trashed food makes climate pollution in landfills. Recycle it in your green bin instead.
- Most California communities now offer green bin composting. Learn what goes in the green bin by visiting the Curb Your Food Scraps page on RecyclingReimaginedCA.com.
- Set out a clearly labeled "food scraps" bin next to your trash, as well as a recycling bin for bottles, cans and other containers so everyone can participate.

3. Eat, Drink and Be Eco-Friendly

- Use reusable plates, cups and utensils instead of disposable options.
- Decorate with items you can use year after year or make compostable decor from natural materials.
- Collect empty wine, liquor, juice or other California Redemption Value (CRV)-eligible containers and cash them in once the party is over.
- Serve water in reusable pitchers or carafes instead of single-use plastic bottles.



Photo courtesy of Shutterstock

4. Give Greener Gifts

- Choose experiences over stuff, like tickets to events, museum or club memberships, registrations for classes or shared adventures.
- Wrap gifts in fabric, scarves or reusable tins. Or use recyclable paper without glitter or foil.
- Personalize presents with homemade crafts, baked goods or services that reduce packaging.
- Prioritize gifts from local and sustainable businesses that are committed to ethical sourcing, minimal packaging and recycled materials.

5. Sort Holiday Waste the Right Way

- After the celebrations, check local recycling rules for how to properly dispose of:
 - o Batteries
 - o Holiday lights
 - o Christmas trees
- Drop off CRV-eligible beverage containers, such as wine and spirit containers, at your nearest recycling site for cash back

- Donate unwanted gifts or gently used holiday items to local charities or thrift stores.

Make this season joyful and sustainable by finding more tips and recycling locations near you at [RecyclingReimaginedCA.com](https://www.RecyclingReimaginedCA.com)



Breaking barriers with flavor and systems: A restaurant owner's journey

By Richard Brown
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

In the heart of Durham sits SoulFire Kitchen, a minority-owned restaurant that has become a beacon of resilience and innovation.

Founded by Marcus Johnson, a Black entrepreneur with deep roots in Southern cooking, the restaurant began as a modest food truck serving collard wraps and smoked chicken. Today, it's a thriving brick-and-mortar space, but the journey was anything but easy.

Johnson faced the dual challenge of breaking into a competitive food market while navigating systemic barriers that minority business owners often encounter: limited access to capital, fewer mentorship networks and the constant pressure to prove value in saturated markets. What set him apart was not just his culinary skill, but his willingness to embrace systems thinking and AI-powered tools to transform his operations.

North Carolina's restaurant scene is crowded, with established chains and trendy newcomers vying for attention. Johnson used AI-driven sentiment analysis

to monitor customer reviews across Yelp and Google. By identifying recurring themes, like praise for his spice blends or complaints about wait times, he adjusted menus and staffing schedules. AI dashboards helped him visualize competitor pricing trends, allowing him to position SoulFire Kitchen as premium yet accessible.

Johnson struggled with fluctuating costs for fresh produce. By integrating AI supply-chain forecasting tools, he could predict seasonal price shifts and negotiate better contracts. For example, predictive analytics flagged a spike in tomato prices weeks before it hit, allowing him to lock in bulk purchases early. This reduced volatility and stabilized menu pricing.

Customers today demand convenience, transparency and personalization. Johnson deployed AI-powered chatbots on his website and social media to handle reservations, answer FAQs and even suggest dishes based on dietary preferences. This not only reduced staff workload but also gave customers a sense of being heard and valued.

Meal kits, delivery apps,

and fast-casual chains all compete with traditional restaurants.

Johnson leaned into AI-driven storytelling. Using generative AI, he created short-form video content highlighting the cultural roots of his recipes: grandmother's gumbo, Sunday cookouts, and the fusion of African and Southern traditions. These narratives differentiated SoulFire Kitchen from faceless substitutes, making dining there an experience rather than just a transaction.

Johnson's turning point came during the pandemic. With foot traffic gone, he faced closure. Instead of retreating, he leaned into AI. Online ordering systems, predictive delivery routes and automated marketing campaigns kept SoulFire Kitchen alive. He realized that technology wasn't just a tool, it was a lifeline. By systemizing his business, Johnson transformed struggle into sustainability.

Richard Brown is the founder of Ward & Brown, helping e-commerce and service businesses scale through AI-powered systemization. Connect on LinkedIn or read more at wardbrown.tech.

Popcorn tailgate recipe

Continued from page 7A

1 teaspoon mustard powder
¼-teaspoon garlic powder
½-teaspoon onion powder
¼-teaspoon salt
¼-teaspoon black pepper
6 slices bacon, diced
4 ounces ground beef
1 tablespoon vegetable oil
1/3 cup popcorn kernels (unpopped)
3 tablespoons cheese powder
1 tablespoon dill pickle powder
1 green onion, thinly sliced

In small bowl, whisk mustard powder, garlic powder, onion powder, salt and pepper. Set aside.

In large skillet over medium-low heat, cook bacon and ground beef 8-10 minutes or until fat renders and mixture is golden brown and crispy.

Transfer to plate lined with paper towels to drain. Reserve 2 tablespoons bacon fat.

In large, heavy-bottomed saucepan over high heat, combine vegetable oil and reserved bacon fat. Add popcorn kernels; stir to coat, then spread in even



layer. Cover with lid. Shaking saucepan, cook 2-4 minutes or until popcorn starts to pop, then shake less frequently, at about 2-second intervals, until popping sounds have almost stopped. Remove from heat. Safely open lid.

Transfer half the popcorn to large bowl and toss with cheese powder. Toss popcorn in saucepan with dill pickle powder, transfer to large bowl of cheese popcorn. Add bacon mix-

ture and reserved seasoning; toss to combine.

Garnish with green onion.

Tips: For beefy flavor, sprinkle popped popcorn with one-quarter teaspoon beef bouillon powder or steak spice, if desired.

For extra-cheesy popcorn, sprinkle popped popcorn with one-half cup shredded mild or sharp cheddar cheese.



North Carolina Angel Tree program supports kids in need for Christmas

By Eric Tegethoff
PUBLIC NEWS SERVICE

A program is helping North Carolina families who are struggling to experience the joy of Christmas.

The Salvation Army of Wake and Lee Counties has partnered with Coastal Credit Union on the Angel Tree program. The project allows people to adopt an angel and provide support to a local child in need.

Area Salvation Army Commander Maj. Lorraina Crawford said the program had about 8,000 children register this year.

"We try to provide a whole entire outfit for the children and three toys,"

she said. "So, we ask corporations to help us, churches, smaller businesses. We put up an angel tree at the Crabtree Mall, and then we have an online site where people can get angels from there."

Coastal Credit Union is hosting the program at all of its branches. Gifts should be dropped off at the branches by 5 p.m. Dec. 5. The Salvation Army asks that gifts donated to its Angel Tree Warehouse in Cary be received by Dec. 8. People who adopt an angel will receive a gift tag with the child's favorite toys and colors, and clothing size.

Crawford said many fam-

ilies this holiday season have to take care of the essentials first, like putting food on the table and paying rent and electricity bills. She said that often leaves Christmas spending low on the priority list.

"That's something that's last, if they had something left over," she said. "And so, we're just trying to help that not be last, that children will still know the joy and hope of Christmas regardless of what financial situation their family is in."

Crawford said the number of registered kids has increased by 1,000 from last year, underscoring the urgent need this season.



An artist's rendition of Forward Together.

Raleigh City Council supports recovery housing for women

STAFF REPORTS

The Raleigh City Council has approved \$2.2 million in Affordable Housing Bond funds to support a new affordable housing community called Forward Together, led by local nonprofit organization Healing Transitions.

The project will create 17 new affordable units in Healing Transitions' Women's Campus designed specifically for women and mothers who have completed recovery programs and are ready to rebuild their lives.

The property will include shared spaces for wellness,

peer support, and family connection like yoga and meditation rooms, children's play areas, and community gathering spaces.

The site is conveniently located near public transit, grocery stores, pharmacies and schools, helping residents stay connected to the community and essential services.

This funding comes through the city's Small-Scale Rental Development program, which helps nonprofit developers create smaller, community-based affordable housing communities across Raleigh. The program encourages

innovative housing types and partnerships that fill gaps in neighborhoods where affordable options are limited.

For Raleigh residents, this means more than just new housing units: it's more second chances, more stability for families, and more pathways to long-term recovery and independence.

The property will remain affordable for at least 50 years, helping ensure that Raleigh continues to be a place where people at all stages of life can find support and opportunity.

BOOK

WATCH OUT FOR FALLING IGUANAS
By Edwidge Danticat
Illustrations by Rachel Moss
Akashic Books, \$16.95

On a rare chilly day in Miami, young Leila sets off for school bundled up in her bright red jacket. But this isn't just any cold day, her grandmother, Grandma Issa, gives her an unusual warning: "Watch out for falling iguanas."

As Leila navigates her morning, she can't stop thinking about Grandma's strange words. From remembering dodging co-

conuts and seeing her parents' car being held up by chickens crossing the road to admiring roaming peacocks, Leila's day is full of curious encounters. But nothing prepares her for the moment she sees an iguana drop from a tree.

Join Leila, her close friends and her teacher, Ms. Benoit, on an unexpected adventure as they discover why these tropical creatures fall from trees during cold snaps. With charming illustrations by acclaimed Jamaican artist Rachel Moss and a truly heartwarming story, "Watch Out for Falling Iguanas" is a de-

lightful tale about family, friendship and the surprises nature can bring.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Edwidge Danticat was born in Haiti and moved to the United States when she was 12. She is the editor of "Haiti Noir" and "Haiti Noir 2: The Classics," Danticat teaches at Columbia University.

Rachel Moss is an illustrator in love with the bright colors and vibrant energy of the Caribbean. She was born in Jamaica and studied animation in England at the University for the Creative Arts. Moss now lives in Jamaica, where she spends her days illustrating children's books.