

the Stand

south side news

www.mysouthsidestand.com

Syracuse, NY

NOVEMBER 2012 Issue 22 FREE

DANCE AS A LESSON

Parents participate as their children learn steps, moves on stage

Old Skool Sunday show

Dr. Rick Wright brings his touch to radio

water power

Program collects rain to foster plant growth, avoid sewer overflow

Always a performer
Tonaisa Hurt strives to pursue passion for singing, arts in college

FRIENDLY FIVE: THE STUDIO



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SOUTH SIDE COMMUNICATION CENTER
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IN KEEPING WITH COMMUNITY STANDARDS.**4** **FEATURES** | Meet Viccarra Coker, a licensed practical nurse, who works for the Center for Court Innovation and helps young mothers in drug court find medical care.**6** **FEATURES** | Read all about the Educational Opportunity Center, which teaches basic professional skills and holds events such as the recent Health and Science Fair.**8** **COMMUNITY** | Check out the St. James Roman Catholic Church and other organizations that provide food, warmth and prayer for the homeless.**10** **FEATURES** | Tonaisa Hurt, a 14-year-old hyper-involved singer, actress and dancer, vows to be famous by the age of 19. Find out what motivates her to succeed.**12** **COMMUNITY** | Strolling the South Side features Dr. Rick Wright, whose personality shines over the radio waves of Power AM 620 every Sunday.**14** **YOUTH** | Akilah Cage has found ways to bring parents and their children together at the Young and Talented Performing Arts Kompany.**16** **COMMUNITY** | Read about the green initiatives on the South Side in connection with the Save the Rain project, which reduces pollution by capturing runoff rainwater.**18** **ENTERTAINMENT** | A Friendly Five column looks at Ozell Cooper, a musician and singer, who built a rehearsal space in his basement that he offers to musicians for free.

■ Cover photography of Aliyah Crouch, during a jazz lesson, by Taylor Baucom

CALENDAR | NOVEMBER

What: CNY International Citizen Awards Dinner**When:** 6 to 8:30 p.m. Friday, Nov. 9**Where:** Onondaga Community College, 4585 W. Seneca Turnpike**More Details:** This event will feature special selections of international cuisine, live entertainment and the chance to hear about outstanding individuals and organizations and their unique contributions in making Central New York a diverse, multicultural, international and global community. Keynote speaker will be Catherine Anne Bertini, former chief executive of the United Nations and current Syracuse University professor at the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs. Open to adults only.**Cost:** \$40 per person or \$300 for a table of 8**More Info.:** Visit icsyracuse.org, call (315) 471-0252 or email mail@icsyracuse.org**What:** Junior Café Scientifique**When:** 9:30 to 11 a.m. Saturday, Nov. 17**Where:** Museum of Science and Technology, 500 S. Franklin St.**More Details:** November's talk will be on "Glaciers, Gorges and Mastodons: The Ice Age of New York" with speaker Dr. Warren D. Allmon, Hunter R. Rawlings III professor of paleontology at Cornell University and director of the Paleontological Research Institution in Ithaca. A light continental breakfast will be served, and Scientifique guests are invited to explore the MOST after the presentation.**Cost:** Free. All ages are welcome, but the talk is geared toward middle-school students and older.**More Info.:** RSVP to jrcafe@tacny.org

Our recent Behind the Scenes workshop provided an opportunity for readers and staff to engage.

A main topic discussed was last month's cover story by community correspondent Keith Muhammad on Bernard Cannon. During the workshop, Keith shared how he got the idea from the suggestion of another resident. He was intrigued by Bernard's posters with messages such as "Stop the Senseless Killing of Our Youth," and by his effort to combat the cycle of violence many connect to the South Side.

To pursue the story, Keith shared how he simply walked over to where Bernard had set up on the corner of West Colvin Street and Midland Avenue to ask questions. During their conversation, Keith learned much more about Bernard's childhood and why he is committed to this cause.

To complete the story, Keith said he used "*what little talent*" he has to begin writing what he was told. Keith's goal in writing for The Stand has always been to heighten awareness of social struggles and bring about change. After I read Keith's story, I knew it had to be shared. Next, I paired Keith with our staff reporter, Natalie Caceres, to add context and provide the community's voice. She was able to contribute additional interviews and produce a video to accompany the story, but she did not alter Keith's tone. His story showed one man's crusade to improve his community.

During the workshop, Reggie Seigler, a board member and music columnist for The Stand, commented on the piece. He felt seeing a photo of a gun — even though it was fake — in print was shocking. But knowing that Bernard took five knives off the street, Reggie said he had to applaud his efforts. "I may have seen kids with a knife and just told them to 'put that away,'" Reggie said. "But I never collected one. That's zero for me and five for Bernard."

Others in the room agreed. The story resonated with them because it spotlighted a community member working in a unique way to address a problem — and in such a way that many people would never attempt.

The Stand exists to share community stories. We want to help you write your own or assist in pairing you with a reporter who can tell the story for you. When someone like Keith — who loves to write — comes to us, we believe the best support we can give is motivation to help bring out one's natural talent.

Writing takes time. Natalie even shared that despite being a graduate student who is pursuing a journalism career, she struggles with writing. Our take: Make it fun and tell what is most interesting. We teach our workshop attendees to use their natural curiosity to develop a story idea and to make an interview a conversation, not an interrogation. And when writing, start with what is most interesting and go from there.

During the workshop, we were also glad to have local residents share feedback. And we were especially happy to learn that Eagle Wings Academy, a private Christian school based in Grace Baptist Church, uses The Stand in its classroom. It's great to know local students are following community news through our pages, and we hope to hear more from these students and to feature their work in future issues.

Just as Bernard works to engage the community with his single voice, The Stand offers a chance for residents to share theirs. To be heard, simply take a moment to speak up. Reach me at Ashley@mysouthsidestand.com or (315) 882-1054.

Ashley Kang

BEHIND THE SCENES



> Ashley Kang and Keith Muhammad



> Leasia Thompson, Eagle Wings Academy eighth-grader



> Natalie Caceres, The Stand staff reporter



> Larry Seager, South Side resident

| Reggie Seigler, Staff Photo

LOCAL ACHIEVERS

The South Side Achiever is a feature in The Stand that highlights an accomplished person in the community.

ORGANIZATION

Patient Navigator Program

PATIENT NAVIGATOR

Viccarra Coker



Viccarra Coker

Cares for mothers and their children in drug court and beyond

By | Tyler Greenawalt
Urban Affairs reporter

Local woman describes the feeling when babies are born drug-free – “I’m so happy”

Viccarra Coker, a 31-year-old licensed practical nurse from the South Side, says all she has ever wanted to do was help people in her community. So when a program began seeking someone who could link young mothers in drug court with medical services for their children, Coker knew the job was perfect for her.

“As a child, I always said I wanted to be a lawyer, and then when I started doing nursing I was saying, ‘I wish there was a way I could work with the court system in some way,’” Coker said.

A year ago, Coker, a lifelong Syracuse resident, became a “patient navigator” for the Center for Court Innovation, a nonprofit organization based in New York City that promotes reform in the New York state court system. As the sole employee of the Patient Navigator Program, Coker provides the link between the court system and proper healthcare for women, said Sarah Reckess, senior associate for the Center for Court Innovation.

The Patient Navigator Program tries to improve the health of young mothers and their children by establishing medical care during and after pregnancy, Reckess said. Most of the clients are referred to the program by judges in drug court, but under a new one-year, \$50,000 grant from the Health Foundation for Western and Central New York, the Patient Navigator Program has expanded its operation to more than just drug court, Coker said.

Coker works directly with the women. She helps them receive proper medical attention and obtain items and food — such as diapers and infant formula — that they need to raise a healthy child. Coker said being a mother can be hard sometimes, and she wants to make sure the women get the best care she can provide.

“The last thing I would want is for them to be overwhelmed about something that I can kind of support them with and be a help for,” Coker said.



> Viccarra Coker, a young, working mother, is a beacon of hope for other mothers. | Annie Flanagan, Staff Photo

After speaking with new clients, Coker determines exactly what kind of care they will need. Reckess explained that the need could be as simple as setting up a doctor’s appointment, or as complex as accompanying a pregnant woman when she is giving birth.

Tracie Young-Hall, a current client, said she has high praise for Coker’s work. Young-Hall, who has been in the Patient Navigator Program since last November, said she sees Coker as a role model and a friend.

“She pushes me,” Young-Hall said. “If it wasn’t for her, I wouldn’t be where I am today.”

Coker helped Young-Hall search for a job, buy clothes for her children and resolve family issues. Coker also helped her become a certified nursing assistant, which is a nurse who gathers information before the patient sees the doctor.

“What makes her awesome to me is the person that she is,” Young-Hall said. “She’s a genuine person. Her heart is good.”

Young-Hall said since Coker is a young, working mother, she easily connects with her clients. Coker said

NOMINATE SOMEONE

Do you know a South Side Achiever? Nominate that person by contacting Ashley@mysouthsidestand.com or (315) 882-1054

“She pushes me. If it wasn’t for her, I wouldn’t be where I am today.”

— Tracie Young-Hall

she has developed a rapport with many of her clients because she has had similar experiences.

“It makes me feel good and makes the clients feel good to be talking to someone who can relate to what they’re going through,” Coker said. “It allows them to open up.”

Since Coker has lived in Syracuse all her life, she knows a lot about the community she serves. Leah Russell, who teaches English as a second language at the Center for Court Innovation, said this is another reason Coker is a great resource.

“Being a part of and immersed in the community that you serve is a really important part of being able to reach out to your clients and make them feel comfortable,” Russell said.

“You understand their experiences and where they come from because you come from there, too.”

Russell said she knows asking for help is hard, but Coker creates an atmosphere of trust and comfort. This allows Coker to help her clients make connections between their daily activities and their long-term health that might not be obvious to them, Russell said.

Coker said she has handled more than 100 cases during her time as patient navigator and that the most rewarding experience is when a baby is born drug-free.

“Every time those babies are born, I’m so happy,” Coker said. “It’s just beautiful for them to have a drug-free birth, a drug-free pregnancy. It’s very rewarding.”

Although Coker works alone, she said she is never overwhelmed by the workload because of the staff members at the Center for Court Innovation. She said she has worked since she was 14 and has never worked with a more supportive group of people.

“I love coming here to work,” Coker said. “I wouldn’t trade this experience personally or professionally for anything in the world.”



Find these words in this story

Genuine

Authentic, real and honest

Rapport

A positive relationship between people

Immersed

Involved in something completely

How would you use these words in a sentence?



> Children’s drawings decorate a bulletin board in Viccarra Coker’s office. | Annie Flanagan, Staff Photo

COMING TOGETHER

First a health and science fair, next some educational offerings



> Darshini Roopnarine, director of the Collegiate Science and Technology Entry Program at Le Moyne College, holds her son, Aadesh, at the Educational Opportunity Center's Health and Science Fair in September. | Quentin Brunson, Photo Provided

By | Emily Pompelia
Urban Affairs reporter

Educational Opportunity Center to benefit from grant that will provide digital services

The Educational Opportunity Center, which teaches basic professional skills, may be “one of the best-kept secrets in Syracuse,” in the words of a Le Moyne College official who works there. But the center, at 100 New St., may soon become better known. Le Moyne will use half of a \$45,000 grant to fund programs at the EOC, such as starting a service-learning website, webinars and other digital education supplements.

The other half of the grant was used in September to fund a Health and Science Fair. More than 200 Syracuse residents gathered in the EOC parking lot at New and Montgomery streets on the South Side to learn how to live a healthy lifestyle.

Darshini Roopnarine, the Le Moyne official, believes the center was the perfect host for the event.

“It’s centrally located, and it serves the population we want to reach,” said Roopnarine, who is the director of the Collegiate Science and Technology Entry Pro-

“Community service ... it’s supposed to be fun.”

— Darshini Roopnarine

gram at Le Moyne and is responsible for CSTEP receiving the service-learning grant.

The EOC has been serving the South Side for more than 30 years. All of its programs and services are free, Roopnarine said, including college and GED preparation, and preparation to become a certified nurse’s aide.

She said the fair, which was coordinated by the EOC and Le Moyne, illustrates the partnership that the two have with the community. The Health and Science

Fair was held in partnership with the MOST, a downtown Syracuse science museum; the Cornell Cooperative Extension, an educational program helping people learn through community engagement; and other local organizations.

Le Moyne and CSTEP coordinate the service-learning online projects, made possible through the grant. Roopnarine hopes the online projects will be finished by the end of this academic semester, she said.

Service learning is a big component of CSTEP, Roopnarine said. In fact, she received a service-learning grant previously, when she was the director of CSTEP at Morrisville State College. Roopnarine explained the difference between community service and service learning. "Service learning is when you apply your major to serving a need for the community," she said.

CSTEP and the EOC see value in students applying their studies to serving the community. Roopnarine coordinated Le Moyne student volunteers to help out at the health fair. Before the event, eight senior nursing students set up boxes of stickers, glitter, water bottles and other giveaways, such as Syracuse University basketball T-shirts and samples of lip balm.

Kara Keyes, professor of health assessment, family nursing and service learning at Le Moyne, coordinated some of the nursing volunteers. She said the fair was a great resource for South Side residents and equally valuable for the nursing students because it teaches them what it means to give back.

Fairgoers learned proper hand washing, got measured for height and weight, and had their blood pressure taken. The parking lot of the EOC was transformed into a fair with two large, white carnival tents, two bouncy houses, zumba class, science experiments, health resources and cooking demonstrations.

"Community service isn't all sweat and tears — it's supposed to be fun," Roopnarine said.

Do you need help with your breast cancer bills?

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SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY: Scholarship in Action



CARE FOR HOMELESS

Ministry worker: "We won't turn our eyes or hearts away from them"



> James, who is homeless, spends time in Firefighter's Memorial Park in downtown Syracuse. | Sarah Milliron, Staff Photo

By | Becca Milliron
Urban Affairs reporter

South Side church and other organizations serve various needs of neighboring people

Over the past five years, St. James Roman Catholic Church, on the South Side's southernmost edge, has developed a special relationship with Syracuse's homeless population. The church works with other organizations — including such South Side institutions as the Oxford Street Inn — to provide food and basic care to men and women living outdoors.

The parish, 4845 S. Salina St., also provides sandwiches, foot care and haircuts to the Oxford Street Inn, which is a shelter for men at 201 Oxford St. Sheila Austin, Emmaus Ministry coordinator, fills her black Subaru Outback with hot soup, coffee and baked goods, and she travels with a group of other parishioners around to different spots where homeless people congregate on a regular basis.

"We try to be prepared with coats or blankets if people need them because what I have found is if they're in need, they need the supplies now and not in three more hours," Austin said.

Austin said she knows she can't fix the homeless problem entirely. However St. James' purpose is to do what it can by trying to fill the material, spiritual and emotional needs of the homeless. The Samaritan Center, 310 Montgomery St., in the basement of St. Paul's Episcopal Cathedral, offers a hot meal to anyone in need, every day of the week. Breakfast is served on weekdays.

"We are a no-questions-asked organization. If you come in looking for a meal, that's what you'll get," said Julie Gilbert, a Resource and Referral Specialist at the Samaritan Center.

Breakfast is served Monday through Friday, 7:30 until 8:30 a.m., and a dinner meal is available Monday through Thursday, 3:45 until 4:45 p.m., as well as Friday through Sunday, 1:30 until 2:30 p.m.

Bob, a homeless man, has been eating at the Samaritan Center for the past four weeks. He said he enjoys this particular center because the food isn't bad and seconds are available.

"I've never felt not welcomed here," Bob said. "When you're here you're like everyone else just wanting a hot plate. The worst stereotype people think of homeless is that they are all lazy and drunk, but the truth is we're just like everyone else."

Bob became homeless recently and hopes to be on his feet soon.

“Most people think the homeless are below them and that’s just not right,” Bob said. “I’ve sat next to you, talked to you, but you’d never know I was homeless.”

Jim Taylor, chairman of the homeless and housing coalition of Syracuse and Onondaga County, said the homeless population includes people who have lived here for a long time and also people passing through looking for work.

“If all the shelters are filled, the county will pay for a hotel room for the homeless, and you can sign up for that at the Civic Center” Taylor said.

After the deaths of Michelle Noce and Tim Wilkin, two homeless people in the area, St. James organized a memorial service for each.

“After Tim died, Father John Manno and I went to the McBride Street camp where he stayed,” said Austin, the Emmaus coordinator, referring to the encampment near McBride Street and Erie Boulevard.

“When we asked his friends if they’d like us to hold

a prayer service, across the boards it was a yes,” Austin said. “People who are homeless grieve just like we would. They sat around, laughing and crying as they told stories about Tim and Michelle.”

Austin said the most important thing that one can do is to remember that homeless people are human.

She tries to maintain her relationships with the homeless by dropping by homeless camps two or three times a week just to have a conversation and ask how everyone is doing.

“The impact of a conversation is so great,” Austin said.

“There are people who may have a slew of issues from drug addiction or mental illness to losing a job or family member,” she said. “They’re overwhelmed by negative things and to live on the streets they must adopt an insulated way of living and always be cautious at their vulnerable state.

“But we want them to know we recognize them like anyone else, and we won’t turn our eyes or hearts away from them.”



RESCUE MISSION

120 Gifford St.

(315) 701-3102

The Rescue Mission provides a shelter for men 18 years and older from 5 p.m. to 7 a.m. daily.

A day center is open from 7 a.m. to 4:45 p.m. It provides showers, meals and clothing.

The Rescue Mission also can help with jobs and housing.

BOOTH HOUSE

677 S. Salina St.

(315) 471-7628

This is a shelter for youth ages 13 to 17 who have run away or are homeless. A young adult can stay at this shelter for up to 60 days.

SAMARITAN CENTER

310 Montgomery St.

(315) 472-0650

The Samaritan Center provides a hot, nutritious meal to those in need.

Breakfast is served weekdays from 7:30 to 8:30 a.m.

Dinner is served Monday-Thursday from 3:45 to 4:45 p.m., and Friday through Sunday from 1:30 to 2:30 p.m.

SALVATION ARMY WOMEN'S SHELTER

1704 S. Salina St.

(315) 472-0947

This women's shelter provides short-term crisis management and case management while women are staying there.

No children are allowed.



Singing Her Way to Fame

> Tonaisa Hurt, center, rehearses with the youth choir at Bellegrove Missionary Baptist Church. | Katie Hogin, Staff Photo

By | Emily Pompelia
Urban Affairs reporter

A high school student's gift for performance and vocal ambition drive her to succeed

The first time Tonaisa Hurt stood up to sing a solo in front of her church congregation, it was because her mother had slipped her \$20 to do so. But her anxiety at performing in public fell by the wayside. Tonaisa has been singing and dancing nearly every day of the week since she was a child. And lately, she's started writing avidly.

As a 14-year-old freshman at Syracuse Academy of Science Charter School on the West Side, Tonaisa is what some could call hyper-involved in the arts. She sings with three choirs at her South Side church, Bellegrove Missionary Baptist Church, 219 W. Castle St., and dances in the Dance Ministry. Tonaisa also was recently cast as a lead in her school's rendition of "Daddy's Girl,"

a comedic play set in a diner.

Tonaisa's busy schedule keeps her going from one rehearsal to the next.

Tonaisa said she has been singing ever since she can remember and that it is "a natural gift." But Tonaisa's most recent hobby is creative writing. It is her favorite class in school, and she says she loves the "freedom" in creative writing.

"You don't have to think about others," she said. "It's just how you feel."

She credits her parents for her love of performance. She said that every week, they would take her to church, where she first started performing.

Her mother, Rosalyn Hurt, recalls those days. "My family used to tell me, 'That little girl can sing,'" she said.

After Tonaisa's first few solos, she started to stand on her own, Rosalyn Hurt said. "Just about everything she does, she does well."

Both of her parents say they try to live their lives as examples for Tonaisa, her older sister Jah-ni and younger sister Charity.

Tonaisa's father, Jesse Hurt, is a deacon at Bellegrove and considers himself a community activist. He founded Operation H.O.P.E., which stands for Helping Other People Excel, an organization providing residents on Hope Avenue — where the family lives — with everything from food around the holidays to home and garden supplies to improve their property.

"Some of the things you see out here are not good things," Jesse Hurt said, pointing to Hope Avenue. "But we have to teach them to love all people and to not become a product of your environment."

Jesse Hurt said that the area they live in is not the best, but he thinks his family is blessed to be where they are. "I love the South Side. I haven't been anywhere, in the 30 years I've lived here, but on the South Side of Syracuse."

Rosalyn Hurt agrees. "A lot of people think that the South Side is bad, but it's not. It's all in how you make it."

Tonaisa has made the best use of her singing talent, and she doesn't attribute her perseverance to an idol or a role model. "My ambition makes me want to sing," she said.

Although usually confident, Tonaisa recognizes the pressure that comes with performing. She recalled one time this past year when she forgot the lyrics to a song during a church performance. She stopped and fled the stage. Tonaisa said she cried for three days over the incident, then thought, "Wait, why am I crying? I sing all the time.

"I have the gift of knowing what key you're supposed to be in, this and that," she said. "But the responsibility factor? I'm still a kid. I'm still goofy."

She describes how these characteristics define her. "I'm always going to be that person no matter how much you try to change me," she said. "I'm always going to be loud, and crazy."

Tonaisa said that she tried to change before entering high school out of fear that her older peers wouldn't like her. "I tried to change it and I realized I wasn't being me, I was being fake."

Tonaisa intends to go to college and wants to be successful. She said her parents have never given her an option, always telling her that she will go to college. "I've always thought that college has to be the next step."

She hopes to attend either New York University or Princeton University. She even named her dog Princeton, a companion she has had for three years, she said.

Tonaisa acknowledges that most of the youth she spends time with on the South Side or at school will not be able to go to college. "If they're on the streets, that may be all they know is streets because no one gave them that push or that drive to try to make something of themselves," she said. "But I'm glad I do have that push."

Regardless, Tonaisa said she has loved growing up on Hope Avenue on the South Side. "That's what makes my friends my friends," Tonaisa said. "We're not all the same, but we're not all different."

In the front window of the Hurt family home hangs a sign that reads, "Joy." Three years ago, while decorating for Christmas, the family decided to leave that sign hanging year-round. "We stand on that," Rosalyn Hurt said.

Though Tonaisa will always call the South Side home, she has big plans for herself even beyond NYU or Princeton.

"I'm going to be famous by the time I'm 19," Tonaisa said. "I'm telling people, I'm not kidding. I'm going to be famous by the time I'm 19."



Find these words in this story

Avidly

Done enthusiastically or with much craving

Perseverance

Persistence in sticking to a plan

Ambition

Motivation or a strong urge to achieve something

How would you use these words in a sentence?



> Tonaisa Hurt and her sisters, from left, Jah-ni and Charity, chat at Bellegrove Missionary Baptist Church. The 14-year-old dreams of one day being a singer and songwriter. | Katie Hogin, Staff Photo



CALL IN TO THE SHOW

Main line
(315) 421-9436

Website
www.wphrfm.com
Dr. Rick Wright's page is under the "On Air" tab

BOOK PROJECT

Dr. Rick Wright is writing a book, "Syracuse Radio and Its Historical Contributions to Mass Communications — 1920 to the Present."

Content will include Syracuse radio stations WSYR, WOLF, WFBL, WAGE/WHEN, WNDR, WAER and WJPZ.

"The book will also include untold stories of the contributions of Syracuse University to the field of radio broadcasting, and many other related stories on other Syracuse AM and FM radio stations and their histories."

— Dr. Rick Wright

STROLLING *the* SOUTH SIDE

Radio host brings personal touch to show as business continues to evolve



> Dr. Rick Wright dances in his chair as he plays music for his "Old Skool Sunday" listeners. His radio show, which airs on Power AM 620, gives community members an opportunity to share local news and events. | Natalie Caceres, Staff Photo

By | Natalie Caceres
Staff reporter

Local radio host stays true to roots despite growing use of preprogrammed content

Dr. Rick Wright purrs into the microphone with such suave vocal tones you'd think you were being serenaded.

"You've reached the Old Skool hour."

Wright's "Old Skool Sunday" radio program, which features classic R&B, began 12 years ago.

Today, the show broadcasts Sundays from 1 to 7 p.m. on Power AM 620. While his live content approach to radio hasn't changed, it seems the other stations have.

This is where the trend of radio is moving — pre-programmed content allowing stations to employ fewer people in an effort to reduce expenses. What's lost is original voice and personality. But with Wright, personality is kept on the local airwaves along with the opportunity for the community's voice to be heard as well.

"Radio has lost its luster because we have no act," said Wright, who is on faculty at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University. "An act attracts. Content is king ... and we've lost that."

Wright broadcasts from the Clear Channel building on Plum Street. Throughout the show, Wright includes segments that spotlight local churches and that speak to community members.

Every Sunday, though, Wright finds himself in a barren station that once was filled with an entire staff. All that sits now?

A memory of what radio used to be.

"It's a sad thing," he said, while walking around the station, showing all the empty chairs and rooms that used to be occupied.

"We have six other shows in here right now that are all running on computers," Wright said, as a track of adult contemporary music played in one of the empty rooms. "That's not radio."

SUGGEST A LOCATION

To submit an idea for Strolling the South Side, contact Ashley Kang at (315) 882-1054 or Ashley@mysouthsidestand.com

LOCAL SPOTLIGHT

On a recent artist spotlight, Wright features a local South Side artist named Sparkle 1. Her new song “This World Is Not My Own” has just come out. Wright has invited her to the station to not only play it, but to talk about it as well.

“It means a lot for people like me,” Sparkle said. “People will come up to me and say they’ve heard of me from being on his station.”

She says that community radio doesn’t have enough figures like Wright, who focus on live and local content. “I know people that tune in just for his show, and once it’s over, tune out.”

Jason Willis, a South Side native who has known Wright for almost eight years, comes back each week to listen to Wright’s show because of the live format.

“The music he plays is my favorite part,” Willis said. “You don’t hear other stations play that anymore.” He emphasizes that Wright’s unique commentary and personality are what make his show distinct.

Live programming is nothing new, Wright points out, but it’s quickly becoming the past.

“I’ve been in this game a long time and the bottom line is that radio is a business,” Wright said.

It doesn’t mean, though, as Wright vehemently defends, that a show should lose its flavor.

DISCOURAGING TREND

WCOV Family Life, a religious radio channel run out of Bath, N.Y., and broadcast in cities like Syracuse, has found that the trend of veering toward preprogrammed content is a difficult thing to juggle. But they, too, have managed to keep live content the foundation of programming.

Sarah Harnisch, an anchor with the station who runs the morning news program every week, says it can take a lot of time and effort to produce original content, but that is what makes a program worthwhile. Like Wright, she also finds that many stations are losing, or have already lost, their distinctive personality.

“It’s discouraging to see them succumbing to the trend,” Harnisch said, “especially among small stations because they just don’t have the people ... the content just becomes stale.”

Harnisch noted that the station is in the process of hiring new staff. It appears that its commitment to produce live, locally relevant content is appreciated by listeners.

PERSONAL TOUCH

“The great thing about my show is that you don’t know what I’m going to do next,” Wright said. “Whereas other stations serve you a fast-food style of content, I give you the eight-course, sit-down meal.”

As his show winds down for the night, one last caller phones in to let Wright know that her husband has just passed away and she’s hoping he’ll play her a song. In his true, kind and caring fashion, Wright plays her a song by David Ruffin and tells her to stay strong.

Her voice somber, she thanks him. And like so many other call-in listeners this night, before hanging up she tells him, “I love you, Dr. Wright.”

“I love ya, too, darlin,’” Wright answers.

No computer can do that.



> Wright’s program started 12 years ago. It is broadcast Sundays on Power AM 620. | Natalie Caceres, Staff Photo



> Wright, who is on faculty at Syracuse University, highlights local churches on his show. | Natalie Caceres, Staff Photo



> “Old Skool Sunday” features classic R&B along with artist spotlights. | Natalie Caceres, Staff Photo

HOUR BY HOUR

Dr. Rick Wright’s “Old Skool Sunday” show
Sundays from 1 to 7 p.m.
POWER AM 620

1ST HOUR SHOW PREVIEW

Wright introduces what will be happening throughout the show

2ND HOUR CHURCH SPOTLIGHT

Features local church figures to come and speak about what they do and upcoming events

3RD HOUR COMMUNITY HOUR

Community members, like local artists, come to share what’s going on

4TH HOUR 4 O’CLOCK FUNK HOUR

Wright features old dance hits with commentary

5TH HOUR THE HISTORICAL ATTITUDINAL HOUR

Wright looks at historically relevant music that corresponds to the time of year

6TH HOUR LOVE & TESTIFYING HOUR

A final hour that provides love songs and commentary from Wright and listeners

YOUNG AND TALENTED

Parents make a difference by getting involved with their children



> Akilah Cage, standing up on the right, talks with parents and leaders about upcoming aspects of the dance classes. | Taylor Baucom, Staff Photo

By | Tyler Greenawalt
Urban Affairs reporter

Young and Talented Performing Arts Kompany brings dance to area families

For Akilah Cage, a former South Side resident who runs a dance program for youth citywide, support from the parents of her young students has made all the difference in the success of her work.

“With parental involvement, it allows the kids to feel just as good as they do here with me, at home,” Cage said.

Cage runs Young and Talented Performing Arts Kompany, a nonprofit business that teaches styles of dance ranging from urban funk to jazz to break dancing. The program, which is housed at the James Street United Methodist Church at 3027 James St., is in its ninth year.

Christine Cook, who is a member of the parent-run board of directors for Young and Talented, said Cage is not only a good teacher, but also a positive role model for

the students. She said the parents are really there to support Cage as well as the children.

“The engine behind us and the main force is the positive energy of Akilah Cage,” Cook said.

Teaching came easy for Cage because she said she has been dancing since she was 5 years old and teaching dance since she was 14. She also has a degree in criminal justice from Onondaga Community College and studied dance, theater and psychology at Middle Tennessee State University, located in Murfreesboro, Tenn.

Cage, now 32, wanted to find an affordable and meaningful way for young children to learn to dance. When she was growing up in Memphis, Tenn., Cage said she had to pay for dance lessons — something that she didn’t want to happen to the youth in Syracuse. So in 2003, Cage formed Young and Talented and started giving formal dance lessons in her basement on Seeley Road.

In the beginning, Cage said parents would treat her program as a daycare. But when she began charging \$5 for lessons, she said parents began respecting what

she was doing and looked for ways to help. Once Cage decided what she wanted her organization to accomplish, she looked for parents to help her build the program.

“I found I was taking on the roles of parenting and teaching at the same time,” Cage said. “What I’ve found, too, is when it’s just the teacher and the child, the parent comes in, takes the child out whenever they want to, regardless of what’s going on with the child.”

Now, Cage charges \$45 a month for multiple dance lessons at Young and Talented. Since the formation of a parent-run board of directors in 2008, Cage said more parents have become involved not only with the program, but with their children as well, resulting in more positive results from her students.

Cage, who also teaches dance at area schools and for Say Yes to Education, Inc., said she asked parents to volunteer time, donate food to the concession stand at talent shows, and carpool with other parents. After moving from the South Side to her current location, Cage decided she could not run the program on her own and enlisted parents of her students to form a board of directors in 2008. This board, which is composed of seven parents, helped Cage handle money, advertising, teaching and organizing the program.

Bernadette DeMott, who has been a board member all four years, said Young and Talented could not exist without parental involvement. DeMott said every parent plays a role in the program. Some provide transportation for the students and others volunteer their time at events and competitions. DeMott, who used to be Cage’s English teacher at Henninger High School in 1996, serves as assistant director and handles all of the money and communication among board members; she also proofreads brochures and fliers. DeMott said since Cage created a safe and comfortable environment for the students, parents feel just as comfortable getting involved.

Parental involvement is not only important for the development of the program, but also for the development of the students. DeMott said she thinks it is important for parents to be involved in everything their children do.

“It’s the difference between them being successful and not,” she said.

For Cook, working with parents creates a team mentality that also has a positive influence on the students. Cook said parents regularly attend dance rehearsals and shows now.

Cook said she, like many of the other parents, is very involved with Young and Talented. She said she drove students to rehearsals and bought matching clothing for competitions. But for some parents, especially single parents, it is tough to be involved.

“When parents aren’t involved, I don’t think you can really fault the parents because they have so much on

their plate,” Cook said.

When more children began joining the program, parents started wanting to be more involved in the decision-making process, said fellow board member Katishma Grey, who teaches urban ballroom dancing for Say Yes. She said parents and the board work with Cage to make the best possible program for the children to succeed as students of dance and as human beings.

During the season, DeMott said parents meet once a month to discuss how everyone can be involved. The meetings are held to find the strengths among the group of parents and determine the best course of action for helping the program.

Grey also said parental support pushes the children and encourages them to become better dancers.

“The kids are inspired by the parents being involved,” Grey said. “They want to impress their parents and show them what they’re capable of.”

Cage said she created Young and Talented because she wanted to teach children to dance at an affordable price. But once the parents became involved with the program and the students, Cage said she saw a very positive response from both the parents and the students.

“When you see the parents are pushing just as hard as you, that means they see their child’s gift,” Cage said.



> Former South Side resident Akilah Cage has run the Young and Talented dance program for the city’s youth for nine years. | Taylor Baucom, Staff Photo

For more information CONTACT

Young and Talented
Performing Arts Kompany
Phone: (315) 450-3305

Email:
youngandtalenteddance@
yahoo.com

ON THE SIDE

HOW TO APPLY

GIF Program Award Process

- Access the grant application online at <http://savetherain.us>
- Fill out the application and submit
- GIF Committee will review the application for consideration of eligibility and funding recommendation
- Within 60 days of receipt of application, Onondaga County will notify the applicant
- If the project is deemed eligible, a grant amount will be awarded
- Applicant and county will enter into formal contract agreement for reimbursement
- Applicant will complete project as outlined in contract terms
- After construction is complete, Onondaga County will review project and issue a certificate of completion
- Applicant shall submit copy of certificate of completion and completed claim form, provided by the county, and receive a one-time lump sum payment

Source: <http://savetherain.us/green-programs/green-improvement-fund/>

GREEN INITIATIVE

Onondaga County's Save the Rain program hits the South Side



> Naresh Patel, owner of Factory Direct Furniture and Mattress, Kyle Thomas (white shirt) of Natural Systems Engineering, and Jamie Bracy assess a space on Salina Street. | Annie Flanagan, Staff Photo

By | Tyler Greenawalt
Urban Affairs reporter

Green infrastructure techniques on South Side help improve the environment, community

For Amatullah Yamini, improving the South Side with environment-friendly projects is the first step in revitalizing the area and attracting businesses. That's why the South Side business owner puts such hopes on Onondaga County's Save the Rain program.

"Beautification of the South Side is very, very important," said Yamini, who owns the Salina Shoe Salon at 2809 S. Salina St. "To me, it's one of the most beautiful areas of the city. So why not complement this area with the green infrastructure?"

The Save the Rain program, now in its third year, uses green infrastructure techniques such as porous pavements and rain gardens to capture storm water, said Program Coordinator BJ Adigun. The captured water run-off trickles into and mixes with the natural groundwater or is used to grow plant life, Adigun said.

Through these methods, Adigun said the excess storm water does not bounce off the asphalt surface and does not seep into the sewer system, causing what he calls "combined sewer overflow" that results in potentially pol-

luted water flowing directly into Onondaga Lake.

The Green Improvement Fund, which Adigun said supports the green infrastructure projects on private property, awarded Yamini's store a grant to replace her parking lot with porous pavement that would absorb the runoff water into the soil.

"I applaud Onondaga County for working with these concepts of saving the rain," Yamini said. "Just to be able to demonstrate to the community and to young people that we have become innovative and found a way to save that rain water and use it for a very useful purpose."

Yamini's store, which she has owned for seven years, sells shoes and clothing for all ages and genders.

In 2008, Adigun said County Executive Joanie Mahoney created the Save the Rain program as a new way to prevent combined sewer overflow and find ways to capture and save storm water, and it was approved in 2009. Two years after the program started, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency named Save the Rain one of the Top 10 green infrastructure systems in the country, according to an April 2011 EPA publication.

"We wanted to move away from a reactionary method and move toward a more preventative method," Adigun said.

Yamini, who is also a senior management analyst for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, said she heard about the program at a meeting organized by the Southside Community Coalition and the South Side Initiative in November 2010.

Joseph Bryant, the initiative's board president, said that South Side property owners who attended the meeting heard a presentation by National Systems Engineering. The presentation focused on the Save the Rain program, showing eligible properties and which grants were available.

After that meeting, Bryant said Natural Systems Engineering, which is the main firm used for Save the Rain projects, worked with properties along South Salina Street, including: Yamini's shoe store; Factory Direct Furniture and Mattress at 2711 S. Salina St.; the People's A.M.E. Zion Church at 2306 S. Salina St.; Deb's Convenience Mart at 2419 S. Salina St.; and an empty lot at 2326 S. Salina St.

"It falls in line with the coalition's mission to beautify the area," Bryant said. "A lot of the improvements will include new sidewalks, trees and some sort of vegetation or brush, which makes the neighborhood look better."

Naresh Patel, owner of Factory Direct Furniture and Mattress, said he also went to the meeting in 2010. After four years of trying to clean up his lot, which included taking down two billboards, Patel said he has a plan in place, through Save the Rain, to build a rain garden in his parking lot that will capture storm water. His plan includes tearing down a vacant building on his lot and planting shrubs at the edges of his parking lot.

"I'm trying to clean up the South Side," Patel said. "Hopefully, others will do the same."

Kyle Thomas, who owns Natural Systems Engineering and worked with Patel on the project, said he hopes the project at Patel's lot will serve as an example for other South Side residents.

"The fact that he can do a storm water project there that satisfies the county, and they're actually reimbursing it and also is improving the area and the aesthetics of the area is hugely important," Thomas said. "That property, if we do it right, will be an asset in the area."

However, not all South Side properties are eligible, Thomas said. According to the boundary map outlining

the county's Green Improvement Fund, the target areas on the South Side run irregularly between East Colvin Street and South Salina Street, Onondaga Creek Boulevard and West Newell Street, and along South Avenue from St. Agnes Cemetery to Hillview Avenue.

If business owners think they are eligible for Green Improvement Fund grants, Adigun said they can submit ideas to be reviewed by a committee that makes recommendations for the construction. The committee then bases award money on the amount of storm water that can be captured by the project on a per-gallon basis.

Not only does the Save the Rain program capture storm water and prevent sewage overflow into Onondaga Lake, but it also invests money into communities and helps beautify them, Adigun said.

"We are transforming communities," he said. "Being able to work with these folks and finding solutions for development projects improves property values and improves aesthetics around the community."

Yamini said in order to make progress on the South Side, the environment needs change. She said she is hopeful these types of projects will beautify the area, attract new businesses, and inspire a community.

"Many people have not seen any kind of infrastructure work on the South Side that's innovative," Yamini said. "I think it helps open up minds and understand that it's not a community that's left behind."



> The group looks over plans. | Annie Flanagan, Staff Photo

For more information CONTACT

Onondaga County
Department of Water
Environment Protection

650 Hiawatha Blvd. West
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Phone: (315) 435-2260

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Find these words
in this story

Christened

To use something for the first time

Aspiring

Looking forward to something with great desire, hoping for some dream or goal to come true

Impersonations

To mimic the appearance, manner, etc. of (a person)

How would you use these words in a sentence?

COLLECTIVE SOUND

Aspiring artists create music in Ozell Cooper's basement



> Trump Tight 315 members, standing from left: Marty Klueber, saxophone; Bernie Williford, keyboards; Belinda Allen, singer; Eric "Love" Jones, singer; Terrence "Shariff" Robinson, bass guitar; and Donny Clark, guitar. Jamar Lacey, drums, is kneeling. | Reggie Seigler, Staff Photo

By | Reggie Seigler
A *Friendly Five* columnist

South Sider invites in musicians to sing, record, create music, rehearse and mostly have fun

Meet Ozell Cooper. Ozell lives on the South Side. He is a musician and singer and a longtime self-employed carpenter. Ozell used his skills to build a studio in his basement and a rehearsal hall in his garage. He christened the rehearsal space "Coop's Boom Boom Room." The name is a take on the imaginary place "Ray's Boom Boom Room" that Eddie Murphy's character, "Ray," would often dream about in his movie, "Life."

All for fun, over the past 15 years Ozell has opened up his space for aspiring musicians and singers to record, rehearse and basically have fun while honing their talents. He doesn't charge for its use. He and his wife, Sandy, foot all of the electric and heating bills out of their own personal funds.

"I do it for the love of it," he said. "I haven't made a dime off of it since I've been doing it."

He also does it from the goodness of his heart. Those who know Ozell, know that he would give the

shirt off his back to help someone else.

Ozell, 48, has maintained a passion for music throughout his life. He grew up with it. He shared with me that his family had a group when he was coming up.

"We were called the 'Singing and Dancing Coopers,'" he recalled.

A few groups both religious and secular have found a home or have gotten their start in Coop's Boom Boom Room. He mentioned a couple from the past who were close to his heart — the Family Gospel Singers with MB Atkinson, Will Solomon, Joe Ogletree and Gene Hill, all deceased, and Nu Element with Johnny Bowers, deceased.

Today, there is a new group he's working with — Trump Tight 315.

"The 315 tagline on our name distinguishes us from another group in some other part of the country," Jamar Lacey explained.

Jamar is the drummer and leader of the group.

He is no stranger to music. Jamar grew up in a musical family. His father, brother and uncles are all musicians and entertainers. In fact, Jamar started his career playing with his father, bass player Jimmy Lacey.

"What kept me playing drums was my dad," he

said. "He got me my first gig with him in a band called Rodney King and the Night Life Band."

Jamar also has an uncle, C.P. Lacey, who performs impersonations of Michael Jackson, James Brown and other big stars professionally at the Apollo Theater and other international stages.

"I'm not afraid to interact with the audience. I let them know that there are no boundaries for us in having fun so I just get up there and be me."

— Eric "Love" Jones

Other members rounding out Trump Tight 315 include: Terrence "Shariff" Robinson, bass; Donny Clark, guitar; Bernie Williford, keys; Marty Klueber, saxophone; and Eric "Love" Jones and Belinda Allen, male and female lead vocals.

Doing this interview in the Boom Boom Room gave

me a sense of who the members are as individuals and let me see where the band is coming from. Like the band, the room was lively and filled with music and laughter and had as much activity going on at one time as there could possibly be in such a small space. It was very friendly, open and inviting.

Eric "Love" Jones, who is essentially the front man for the group, is a very active stage performer. Drawing from his experience as a dancer and fashion model, he said, "I'm not afraid to interact with the audience. I let them know that there are no boundaries for us in having fun so I just get up there and be me. What you see is what you get."

Eric considers himself old school.

"Older singers gave their soul," he said. "That's what you'll get when you check out a Trump Tight 315 performance."

In the past half year since coming together, the band has performed at Mac's Bad Art Bar, the 2012 Great New York State Fair, Dinosaur Bar-B-Que and private parties.

They are looking to play more.

Their musical style is hip-hop, R&B with a twist, and they want the public to know that their music is about having fun. The band's signature song is Michael Jackson's "Shake Your Body (Down to the Ground)."

"Don't make your art a job," Eric said.

Bernie Williford is the group's musical statesman and director.

"Our group is different than most because we are a dance/show band," he said.

Bernie has had plenty of experience with bands and musical organizations. Originally from Paterson, N.J., he came to Syracuse in 1998 by way of Tampa, Fla.

Bernie has performed on multiple instruments (i.e. guitar, bass and keyboards) since his youth. With this band, he plays keyboards. Bernie wants to build Trump Tight 315 musically into a unit so tight and funky that it can get anyone up and dancing.

Have A Friendly Five suggestion? Contact Reggie at reggie@softspokenband.com or (315) 479-9620

BOOK THEM

For more information or bookings, contact:

Trump Tight 315
(315) 863-6589

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JOURNALISM WORKSHOP

WANT TO SEE YOUR NAME IN PRINT? SIGN UP TO BECOME A NEW COMMUNITY CORRESPONDENT!

HOW: As the voice of the South Side community of Syracuse, The Stand newspaper aims to start a community conversation by inviting residents to share their stories.

Our next writing workshop will be led by [The Stand's founder](#), professor Steve Davis. It is intended for anyone who is interested in learning news writing and becoming a community correspondent.

Our goal is to have a positive impact on the community by introducing youth and residents to opportunities in journalism while also helping college journalism students gain essential skills needed in their future fields.

The next workshop will be held [Dec. 1](#) beginning at [10 a.m.](#) at the [South Side Communication Center](#). Anyone is welcome to attend at no cost, but space is limited. So if you are interested, please let us know as soon as possible. We look forward to hearing from you.

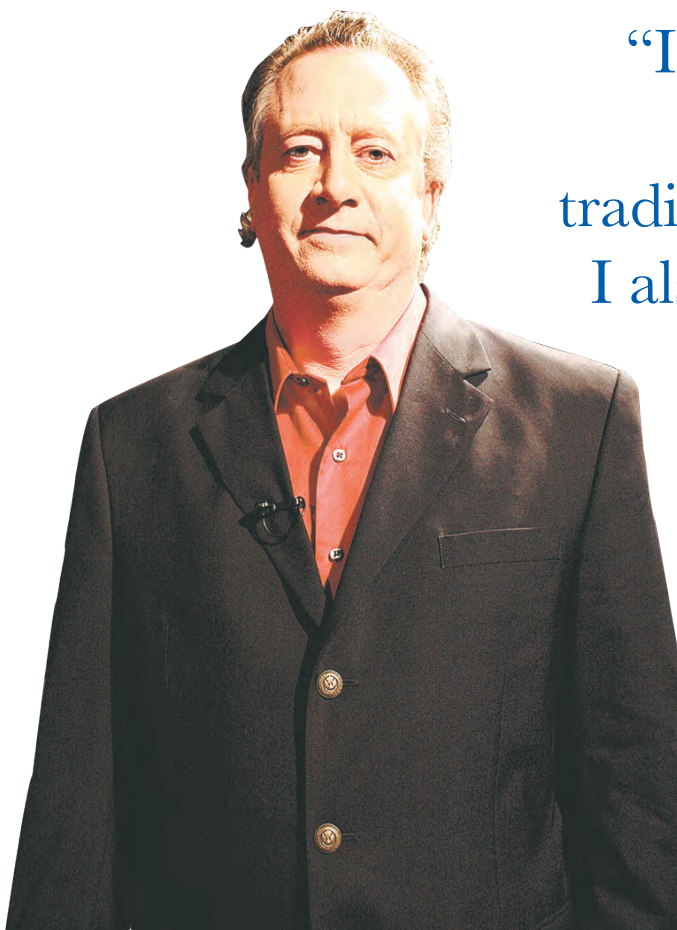
To reserve your spot, [RSVP](#) to Ashley Kang by [Nov. 20](#) by email or phone at ashley@mysouthsidestand.com or [\(315\) 882-1054](tel:315-882-1054).



> During a previous workshop, professor Steve Davis, founder of The Stand, explains what makes a good story. | Ashley Kang, Staff Photo

*We can't be a community project
without the community!*

*If you want to get your voice heard,
speak up and take a stand.*

“I read The Stand because it helps me to connect to a part of the city that traditionally I haven’t been connected to. I also read it because it’s interesting and extremely well written.”

— *Jim Reith*
*The Stand Reader and
host of “Reith” airing weeknights
at 6:30 p.m. on WCNY*

How to purchase an ad
If interested in running an ad, contact **Ashley Kang** to request a rate card and discuss options by emailing Ashley@mysouthsidestand.com or by calling (315) 882-1054. The Stand’s rate card can also be found online.