

From the outside, it looks like any ordinary building. Aside from its size and triangular shape, the building's traditional white paint and red bricks almost blend in with the surrounding homes. However, a few times a month, locals will hear the thump of music vibrating the building and people pouring in as the space known as La Cultura comes alive.

Located on Verbeke Street, La Cultura, or "The Culture," is a new hub for vendors and artists. At least once a month, organizers host pop-up shops, art exhibits, open mics and more, featuring black-owned businesses and African-American artists.

"We need a space for us. We need a space to seek refuge where we feel respected and understood," said La Cultura founder Elyse Irvis. "A space where we can enact our cultural practices, whether it's hearing rap music without hearing someone complain about the choice of genre or selling hair products that are for us."

Businesses such as The Natural Pick, Amma Jo, She is Shic shoes and art organizations like Artcan have used La Cultura for their pop-up shops and exhibits.

"There are so many up-and-coming creatives, artists and entrepreneurs in the area that don't get the opportunity to showcase their greatness," said Erin Moore, founder of The Natural Pick. "This space is unique because it can become whatever you want. This is a space where they seek what's fresh and allows [businesses] the spotlight and exposure."

La Cultura is an idea that Irvis pondered for awhile. After high school, she set off to college at Syracuse University with the intent of never returning to Harrisburg.

Post-college, she lived in Philadelphia for three years and in the Bronx for two. In both cities, people of color made up the majority of the population, and Irvis felt a connection there. She felt a sense of community.

In 2017, when she moved back to Harrisburg, her craving for community persisted. Immediately, she got involved. She began working for a local nonprofit, became the membership chair for the African American Chamber of Commerce and joined Young Professionals of Color of Greater Harrisburg (YPOC). These organizations put her in the center of the local black and brown community of young professionals, and she wanted to help advocate for these businesses and artists.

Last June, Irvis hosted a pop-up shop at a new, black-owned Airbnb located in Uptown Harrisburg. There, she saw that people seemed unaware of the number and quality of local, black-owned businesses. She soon came across the space on Verbeke Street, and everything came together.

"I really wanted to find a way to generate dollars back into the local black community by investing in the local black businesses that you don't see everyday, as far as a set address," Irvis said. "The fact that this space was walking distance from the Broad Street Market, two blocks from the Riverfront, right in the heart of Midtown, the location was good for doing consistent pop ups, which was what I wanted to do and where I saw a need."

La Cultura officially opened its doors in August. The first event landed during 3rd in the Burg, with a plethora of vendors and dozens of attendees. According to Moore, La Cultura not only offers a sense of community and culture, but it helps businesses like hers, which run mostly online, show their face to their community.

"It's one thing to have an online presence and a social media platform, but it's truly an experience when you get to see regulars or potential clients in person," Moore said. "The face-to-face interactions are priceless, and this is a space where I am able to do so."

So far, La Cultura has hosted events such as "The 7th Sense," a live art showcase created to "stimulate all your senses," "Don't Touch My Hair," an event inspired by Irvis' own experiences, where attendees heard from hair experts and purchased locally made products, as well as many other pop-ups.

"There are still places where black and brown people don't feel comfortable," Irvis said. "I want to be a solution to that." **B**

La Cultura is located on 214 Verbeke St., Harrisburg. For more information, visit their Facebook page: LaCultura717.

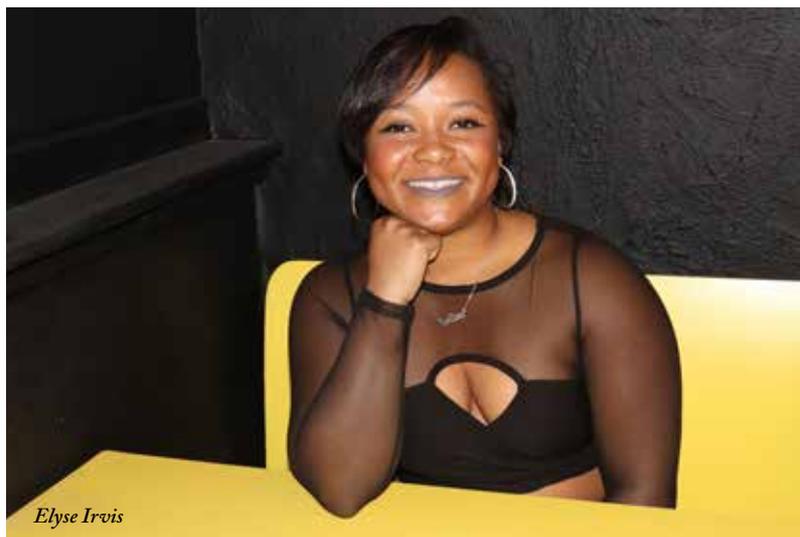
A SPECIAL SPACE

*African-American businesses, artists
find support at La Cultura.*

BY YAASMEEN PIPER



Eric Stinson



Elyse Irvis



Julia Mallory



At the age of 11, Julissa Morales, the daughter of Mexican immigrants, stood on the state Capitol steps reciting her speech about her parents' inability to get a driver's license and the effect it had on her.

Her parents, Luis and Lorena Morales, had joined the Movement of Immigrant Leaders in PA (MILPA), doing advocacy work in the Harrisburg area, and Julissa quickly followed in their footsteps.

"As a kid, I didn't even always know what I was talking about, but I wanted to help," she said.

It's been five years since her speech, and Julissa is now a 16-year-old senior at Harrisburg High School SciTech Campus. Most recently, she was named one of the two Pennsylvania Immigration and Citizenship Coalition's (PICC) 2019 Youth Leaders.

Julissa hadn't even known she was nominated. It was a shock that, out of all the youth across the state, she was chosen. MILPA's Harrisburg coordinator, Maria Alejandra Hernandez, had nominated her.

But what came as a shock to Julissa was obvious to those from MILPA and PICC who knew her, as she has become so embedded and involved in the community on behalf of immigrants.

"She's one of those people we need to look at," said Maria Sotomayor, PICC's deputy director. "I think she's going to do big things."

This year, Julissa joined the Harrisburg City Youth Council and networks with leaders in the community such as City Council members. She also has worked at the Latino Hispanic American Community Center, completing their LISTO program to enhance her leadership skills. She also was involved in the "Familias Separadas" mural.

Last year, Julissa attended the PICC Youth Convening, a weekend-long trip where 30 14- to 24-year-olds across the state meet to develop leadership skills, share their stories and connect with others like them. This is where she met Sotomayor.

"It is important to not just have young people in the front lines, but also making decisions and participating," Sotomayor said. "Young people hold a lot for their families. Sometimes, we don't talk about that."

Julissa displayed the weight she carries as she has often thought, "This could be the last time my dad is coming home."

Her parents never expected that she would become such a leader. She was always a shy child, but both explained how much they've seen her grow.

"Little by little, she started doing little things," said Lorena, with Julissa translating her mother's Spanish to English. "It's really nice to see the young people standing up for things they believe in."

Although her Capitol speech was five years ago, Julissa is still advocating for all immigrants to have access to driver's licenses.

According to the National Conference of State Legislators, 13 states and Washington, D.C., currently allow "unauthorized immigrants to obtain a driver's license." In Pennsylvania, to get a license you must have certain identifiers such as a Social Security card or passport—documents some immigrants do not have.

Julissa sees this as especially challenging in central Pennsylvania, where mobility is a necessity.

However, when Julissa protests or participates in an advocacy event, she has a higher goal in mind than just persuasion.

"I don't want to change your opinion," she said. "I just want to get you to respect us and our community."

Julissa attended the PICC Youth Convening again this year and hopes to continue to show people that the youth are not just the future, but the present.

"This is something that has to be done," she said. "If I don't, who else will?" **E**

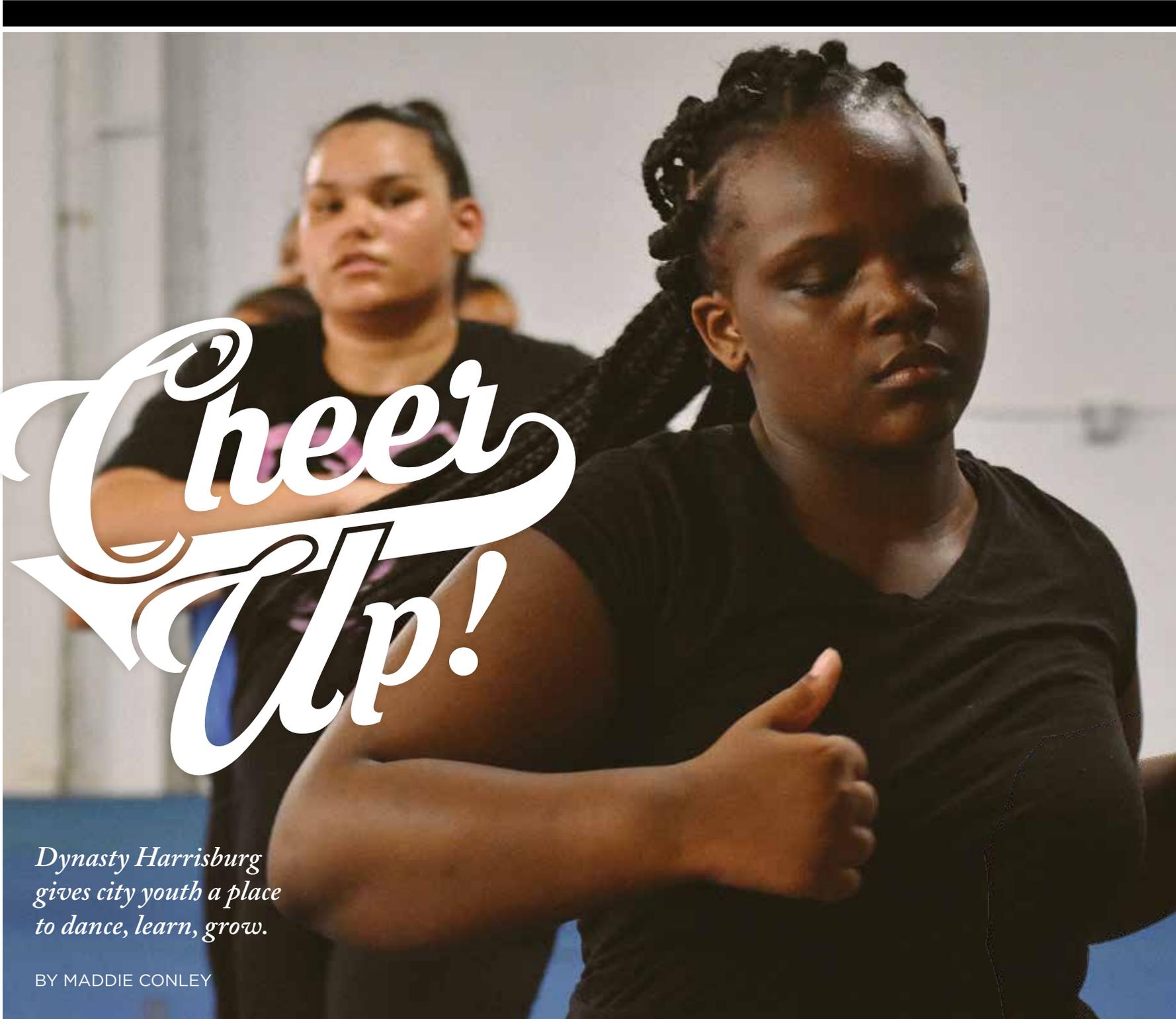


GENERATION NOW

*For Julissa Morales, young people
are the present and the future.*

BY MADDIE CONLEY

For more information on PICC, visit www.paimmigrant.org. To learn more about MILPA, visit www.milpaen-milpa.nationbuilder.com.



Cheer Up!

*Dynasty Harrisburg
gives city youth a place
to dance, learn, grow.*

BY MADDIE CONLEY

Warming for cheer practice at Dynasty Harrisburg.

“How are you wearing your crown today?”

Qwan McIntyre asks his kids this each day.

This is the Dynasty family. More than 40 girls and boys ages 4 to 18 come each week to the warehouse tucked in between a bingo hall and boxing gym. They come to cheer, dance and learn valuable skills for life.

McIntyre is the owner and head coach of Dynasty Harrisburg Cheer and Dance on N. 10th Street in Harrisburg. Beginning in rented spaces in Hershey and Middletown and even holding classes outside, McIntyre

started his cheerleading and dance company in 2015 under the name PA Dynasty.

He has been cheering since he was 4 years old, when he would use school recesses to persuade his friends to join him in cheer jumps and tumbles on the playground. But McIntyre was a boy in a girl’s world, and it wasn’t always easy.

“It was hard to protect myself from the stereotype, but, with the help of my family, coaches, friends and teammates, I was able to build tough skin while growing into the coach I am today,” he said. “I would say the older I got, the more I used the stereotype to my advantage.”

Since those days in elementary school, McIntyre worked his way up to a bigger audience than his playground peers. He is now in his second season cheering for the Baltimore Ravens.

Nonetheless, his real passion is found in a hot and sweaty gym surrounded by kids up on the big blue tumbling mat.

“I give this my all, I give it 2,000 percent,” McIntyre said smiling. “This is my baby. They’re my babies.”

Dynasty Harrisburg offers “tiny classes” for cheerleaders around 3 years old as well as hip-hop classes, open gyms and cheer teams. McIntyre stressed that there is no experience necessary, and there’s a team for everyone.



WE ARE TRYING TO SHOW EVERYONE THAT, NO MATTER WHO YOU ARE AND WHAT BACKGROUND YOU COME FROM, THAT YOU CAN DO THIS AND YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES



Athletes practice with coach Thompson and others.

NEW ADDITIONS

McIntyre kept in touch with childhood cheer friend, Daquan Johnson-Thompson regularly. They had a lot to talk about—Thompson owned a cheer gym in Philadelphia and McIntyre had his in Harrisburg. Realizing how similar their gyms were, they came to a conclusion—it was time for a partnership.

On May 1, PA Dynasty became Dynasty Harrisburg, joining the Dynasty Spirit Elite All-Stars franchise, which is 11 years old and based in Philadelphia. In July, a Maryland location was added to the franchise.

“I can’t wait to see the growth,” said Thompson.

Twice a week, Thompson travels more than two hours from his home gym in Philly to coach in Harrisburg, alongside their staff. That requires more than a passion for cheer, but for the athletes themselves.

“We [Thompson and McIntyre] are like the dads, and the coaches are the uncles and aunts,” he said.

Coming under the Dynasty franchise is a huge deal for Harrisburg’s gym, given the Philly gym’s success. Dynasty All Star Spirit Elite won the Varsity All Star Triple Crown Championship in 2018, making them the first champs to win two years in a row.

Under the new franchise, Dynasty Harrisburg will now offer programs such as Dynasty Motivated—a community outreach program. Coaches and staff will take the kids into the community to participate in activities such as cleanups, breast cancer awareness walks and food drives.

There will also be life skills classes offered for the athletes themselves. McIntyre listed off cooking and art classes as potential offerings.

“I want to help children learn those life skills,” McIntyre said. “At school, you do learn your biologys and your maths and your world history and all that, but I feel like they miss out on teaching how to do checkbooks and budget for our bills.”

The gym will also follow Dynasty Philadelphia’s cyber school program, where they open up their space for athletes enrolled online to work and study in. McIntyre hopes to have teachers onsite that can help them where needed. He expects all of this to begin in the next year or two.

“You don’t see lots of cheerleading programs doing things like this, so that is a big barrier breaker for us,” McIntyre said.

LIKE A FAMILY

Not only is Dynasty breaking barriers with its upcoming programs, but also with the atmosphere they work to create.

Sixteen-year-old Annessa Augustine loves to cheer for the adrenaline rush.

“I didn’t really think I could do it, but I always push myself to learn new skills,” she said.

Struggling with being more reserved, Augustine found growth at the gym. She explained how everyone at Dynasty is like a family, which was comforting and created a space for her to come out of her shell.

“It helps me communicate,” she said. “I’m antisocial, so this changed that for me.”

McIntyre exaggerated how the coaches and staff work to foster that familial atmosphere, one where they teach kindness through leading by example.

That’s what stood out to An’jaleeha “Leelee” Goodman when she switched from her previous gym to Dynasty Harrisburg. The atmosphere was completely different, which helped boost her confidence.

“This gym is about making sure you feel comfortable,” Goodman said. “It’s helped me with anxiety. It helps me all the way around.”

McIntyre also stressed that Dynasty is built on the idea of celebrating diversity in competitive cheerleading. Dynasty’s social media posts often include #blackgirlscheer or #blackfranchise.

“We are trying to show everyone that, no matter who you are and what background you come from, that you can do this and you have what it takes and not to second guess who you are or the way you look,” McIntyre said.

Dynasty Harrisburg is a small gym. It’s easy to miss driving by, and it’s quiet during the daytime. But around 6 p.m., it comes alive and fills up fast. Dancers and cheerleaders take their places on the mat, and McIntyre reminds them to think about “what can you do to uplift yourself and the person next to you.”

Kids come for the sport, but receive more than just athletic training—they gain a family, a support system.

“We are building dream chasers,” McIntyre said. “We are building young men and women who will conquer everything that they put out to do in the world and not just in cheerleading.” **E**

Dynasty Harrisburg is located at 125 N. 10th St. Harrisburg, PA. For more information visit their Facebook page: Dynasty Harrisburg Cheer and Dance.

A SHARED MEAL, A SHARED COMMUNITY

With roots in Jewish tradition, the Freedom Seder draws on several faiths.

BY BARBARA TRAININ BLANK

“In every generation, a person should look at him or herself as having left Egypt.”

Those are perhaps the most emblematic words of the Haggadah—the text read at the Passover seder each year, urging those in attendance to identify with the slavery experienced by the Jews in ancient Egypt, and, by extension, those still yearning for freedom today.

In fact, Passover is known as the “festival of freedom.”

An annual event in Harrisburg brings those words from the Haggadah to life not only for the Jewish but the wider faith community.

For the past eight years, Beth El Temple and the Interdenominational Ministers Conference have co-sponsored what they call the Freedom Seder. Recently, the seder has grown even more, adding the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, the Pennsylvania Council of Churches and the Cathedral Parish of St. Patrick, said Michael Sand, who chairs the Freedom Seder Committee.

“The Rabbinic Advisory Council of Harrisburg has approved the Freedom Seder each year, and congregants from every synagogue in the area have attended,” Sand said. “Individuals also attend from a wide variety of religious faiths.”

The Freedom Seder developed from a friendship between two clergy people of two different faiths.

About a decade ago, Earl Harris, the now-retired pastor of St. Paul’s Evangelical Church, approached Rabbi Eric Cytryn, the spiritual leader of Temple

Beth El, and suggested that they consider ways to bring the African American and Jewish communities closer together and to strengthen alliances first forged during the Civil Rights movement.

A few initiatives resulted—including Bible study, visits of high school students to the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., and the Freedom Seder.

Although the latter draws upon centuries of Jewish tradition, the Freedom Seder is eclectic. The IMC Citywide Revival Choir will sing freedom songs such as “Go Down Moses” and “We Shall Overcome,” while the students of the Silver Academy, the Jewish day school of Harrisburg, will recite one of the hallmarks of the seder—the “Four Questions,” which begins, “How is this night different from all other nights?”

The event also incorporates contemporary topics, with the Torah, Gospels and Koran serving as foundations.

“Each Freedom Seder has a theme,” said Sand. “This year, it’s ‘Welcoming the Stranger,’ including the immigrant community. Members of the three Abrahamic faiths will share readings from their holy books on the theme.”

Though the Freedom Seder is fairly new in the Harrisburg area, the concept isn’t.

“Since the start of the Civil Rights movement, synagogues and African-American churches have joined together to celebrate the journey from slavery to freedom,” Cytryn said.

Arthur Waskow, a Philadelphia-based rabbi and activist, had put together a little book for such celebrations, gleaned excerpts from the traditional

Haggadah. Included were some quotes from Martin Luther King, Jr., and Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, who took part in marches with King.

“We modified the book further,” said Cytryn, keeping the Freedom Seder to about two hours. “Traditionally, it is considered meritorious for Jews to continue discussing the Exodus long into the night.”

The Haggadah at the Freedom Seder “tries to universalize things, such as when we speak of every generation seeing itself as leaving Egypt,” Cytryn said.

Like the traditional seder, the Freedom Seder encompasses a meal, which is kosher. Salmon will be served this year.

Some of the memorable moments of the Freedom Seder over the years were not the formal ones, Cytryn recalled.

“One elderly woman spoke for half an hour about growing up in the Jim Crow South,” he said. “She talked about how people came to this country in chains. Other people attending were crying.”

The seder has morphed into something “much more communal,” he added.

“It’s an opportunity for people sitting together to get to know each other, to introduce themselves and say why they’re there,” he said. **E**

The entire community is invited to attend the Freedom Seder, held on Tuesday, April 9, at 7 p.m., at Beth El Temple, 2637 North Front St., Harrisburg. The cost is \$18. Advance registration and payment are required. Send name, address, e-mail address and payment to Beth El at 717-232-0556. For more information about Beth El Temple, visit www.bethelbbg.org.





ONE FAMILY, ONE HISTORY

In the month of Juneteenth, descendants of Civil War veteran Ephraim Slaughter reflect on the ties connecting their family, their city.

BY M. DIANE MCCORMICK

Young Yvonne Pittman never knew that homes on the other side of her neighborhood lacked indoor plumbing until she walked into a friend's house.

She asked her mother, "Why do they have a bathtub in the kitchen?"

"Don't you ever say anything to them about having outdoor bathrooms," her mother admonished.

"I didn't realize that we didn't have an outhouse," Pittman says now. "We had a bathroom."

The story of African-American life in Harrisburg encompasses integration, business and prosperity, and the power of community. It is also a tale of segregation, deprivation and loss. Three family members descended from Dauphin County's longest-living Civil War veteran carry the legacy. All share a belief that enhanced attention to the small stories of the past can enrich the region's historic tapestry.

They are:

Yvonne Pittman. Her grandfather, Ephraim Slaughter, was an escaped slave, Civil War veteran who lived to age 97, respected businessman and philanthropist. His story and statue are enshrined in a National Civil War Museum exhibit.

Keith Mitchell. Pittman's younger brother. He's a retired official from the state and federal labor departments and a National Civil War Museum board member, giving him the rare distinction of serving for a museum where an ancestor is honored.

Sharonn Williams. Pittman's daughter, contributor to the museum's 2016 African-American Oral History Project, and an experienced genealogist whose ancestral sleuthing uncovered links between Southern plantations and Harrisburg's African-American community.

WHY HARRISBURG?

Pittman remembers Slaughter. She rode with him in Memorial Day parades. They walked hand-in-hand around their neighborhood, the 4-year-old serving as eyes for the nearly sightless elderly man.

"Pop-pop" Ephraim was actually Pittman's step-



Family members Yvonne Pittman, Keith Mitchell and Dr. Sharonn Williams pose with a statue of Ephraim Slaughter at the National Civil War Museum.

grandfather, married to her grandmother, a widow named Georgiana Jenkins. Ephraim and Georgiana were separated by 43 years, married in a fond union that came with a quid pro quo. She would care for him in his old age, making the most of his Civil War pension. He would deed her his considerable property—an estate worth \$10,000 upon his death in 1943.

Slaughter escaped slavery from a North Carolina plantation in 1863. He served with what would become the 37th U.S. Colored Troops (USCT). In 1869, he moved to Harrisburg.

Why Harrisburg?

"That's the big question for us," Williams said.

Maybe it was his association with the Grand Army of the Republic or the railroads rumbling through the city. Or maybe it was the age-old quest for work, including the spot he landed at the legendary Lochiel Hotel, hangout of state Capitol pols and lobbyists.

Ephraim owned homes on Boas, Capital and Forster streets, in the Capitol-area neighborhood now known as Fox Ridge. Mitchell remembers going door-to-door in the 1950s with grandmother Georgiana.

"It really didn't hit me until later that she was actually collecting rent," he said.

Georgiana shared Ephraim's entrepreneurial spirit. In a peripatetic early life in West Virginia, Williamsport and Harrisburg, she cooked on a riverboat, worked in a boy's school and as a live-in maid, and ran a beauty salon catering to white women during the day and African-American women in the evening. She sewed dresses for her granddaughters. She could turn anything into a flowerpot, including Ephraim's spittoon, the one he

never missed even as his sight was failing.

Georgiana cooked elegant Sunday family meals of pig tongue or stuffed fish—plus her hand-churned ice cream for dessert—but saved one pot exclusively for soapmaking. She ran a boarding house catering to traveling African Americans, lodging those barred from whites-only hotels.

She also took the bus to tend her garden in Susquehanna Township and then shared its potatoes and cabbages with families living along the dirt roads of the township's Edgemont neighborhood. She sent her children and grandchildren to the best schools available. She put her sister through college. She was auxiliary president, serving with black and white women, at Ephraim Slaughter American Legion Post 733.

"And she wasn't even 5 feet tall," said Pittman.

Mitchell and Pittman grew up in Harrisburg's integrated neighborhoods and schools. Pittman befriended the sheriff's daughter from a white family living near the Broad Street Market.

"I went to her house, and she came to my house," she said. "We didn't know any different."

Mitchell, 12 years younger than his sister, moved to Susquehanna Township when his parents built a home there. In the township's schools, most of his classmates were Jewish.

"There was never any hatred based on religious beliefs and all that," he said. "If you had disagreements, you had disagreements because of some other reason."

In the lives of Pittman and Mitchell, the merger of Harrisburg's high schools dissolved longstanding friendships, while "white flight" helped reverse the integration that they knew.

"We've gone right back to segregation," said

Pittman. “It happened so gradually that people didn’t pay attention. Because blacks were moving to the suburbs, too, people didn’t know who was being left behind in the urban areas.”

FLOODGATES

As a new Civil War Museum board member, Mitchell’s “number-one priority” is closing a gap between the 18-year-old institution and the community. There, younger generations can learn the history not told in textbooks, because “you can’t know where you’re going unless you know where you’ve been.”

“Even though the museum sits in Reservoir Park, it has not become part of the community,” he said. “It’s kind of up there all by itself.”

The museum is poised to “open up the floodgates” to visitors and volunteers, agrees museum board Chairman Kelly Lewis. The 2017 agreement that settled simmering differences with the city helped guarantee preservation of the museum’s artifacts collection, and digitizing will provide access to researchers worldwide, he said.

The museum can be storyteller of not only the Civil War but its tragic aftermath, when Jim Crow laws backtracked on the freedoms won over spilled blood, Lewis said. In a play on the term Juneteenth, which recognizes emancipation, the museum is developing a “Junetruth” program countering the “Lost Cause” myth.

“There’s still aspects of the Civil War that are being fought in today’s world,” playing out in such areas as inequitable school funding, Lewis said. “It was an all-encompassing civil war, but much of the story told is about generals and battles, not about everyday people and the huge migration of slaves after the Emancipation Proclamation and the humanity of it all.”

On the museum board, Mitchell replaced revered African-American historian Harry Jones after Jones’ sudden death. Lewis hopes to expand the board, enticing more women and “people of all races and creeds to help us tell this story.”

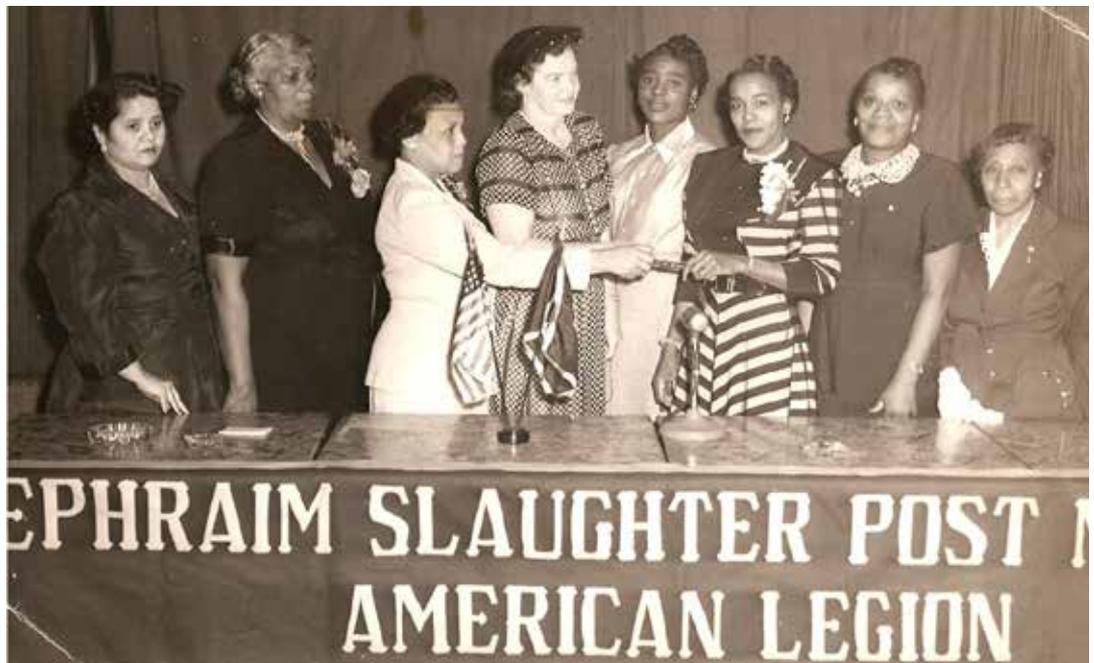
Williams, who offers genealogy workshops, sees hidden aspects of African-American history citywide—say, in the housing project named after black abolitionist William Howard Day, and in Downey School, developed specifically as an integrated institution. Her own work—and the diligent and coalescing efforts of such locals as historian Calobe Jackson, Jr. and activist Lenwood Sloan—are bringing hidden details to light.

“It seems like they only talk about black history during February, but black history is American history,” she said. “It needs to be incorporated all the time. Harrisburg has a very rich history.” **B**

The National Civil War Museum is located at 1 Lincoln Circle, Harrisburg. This month, it notes Civil War Days with tours of Harrisburg Cemetery and the Capitol Preservation Committee’s flag laboratory on June 21, and free admission, with demonstrations and a talk on Juneteenth by the Smithsonian’s Kelly Elaine Davies, on June 22. More information, including a schedule, can be found at www.nationalcivilwarmuseum.org.



Harris AME Zion Church on Marion Street, 1958. Left to right: John Mitchell, with his mother Georgiana Slaughter, mother-in-law Ada Keys, grandmother Louella Jenkins (seated), wife Sarah Mitchell, granddaughter Sharonn Williams and daughter Yvonne Williams



Sarah Alice Keys Mitchell’s installation as president of the Ladies Auxiliary. Georgiana Williams Mitchell Slaughter, past president and widow of Ephraim Slaughter, is in the right corner.



National Civil War Musuem.