

VOICES OF OUR COMMUNITY

Following the death of George Floyd and the nationwide and local Black Lives Matter protests, we asked several members of our Harrisburg community if they would like to share their personal stories.

At any given moment, while sleeping in the privacy of my own home, like Breonna Taylor, while failing to signal a lane change while driving, like Sandra Bland, or while walking down a Chicago street, like Frankie Ann Perkins, I could become the next hashtag #SayHerName.

Black lives matter ALL WAYS and ALWAYS. Everyone has a critical role to play. We must put our energy behind efforts that will make an immediate impact within the City of Harrisburg. Here are a few ways that will yield immediate results.

Vote. Elect candidates whose values align with your own. Politics are the heart of the local community. Every day, you are impacted by political decisions, decisions related to access to quality healthcare, education, childcare, housing and jobs. Be a part of the solutions to ensure your basic needs are fulfilled. Vote like your life depends on it, because it does.

Complete the Census. Census participation will provide federal funding for public transit, early childhood education, school lunches, senior housing and public safety programs. By completing the census, the City of Harrisburg can receive federal funding for programs supporting our most vulnerable residents—our senior citizens and children over the next decade.

Actively engage in City Council meetings. City Council meetings are held every Tuesday. You have an opportunity to participate in the meeting by offering public comment on a bill or resolution on the meeting agenda. You may also offer public comment on any other matter of interest within the city. Public comments become a part of the formal meeting record. Hold us, your local elected officials accountable.

Progress requires effort. The Black Lives Matter protests are a step toward achieving progress. The protests successfully engaged the youth, the old, Black, Brown and white people to march for a cause greater than themselves. While some are marching in the streets, others are raising their voices to achieve progress by engaging their elected officials through phone calls and e-mails. Know that all efforts are seen and heard.

Many of our non-Black colleagues are interested in continuing to make a difference beyond the protests. Our colleagues have been strong allies, showing up and supporting Black and Brown people. We need accomplices. Accomplices will assist in dismantling



the oppressive structures impeding the progress of the Black and Brown marginalized communities without fear of consequences. No progress will be made until those with perceived power will recognize our value in all spaces we occupy. We bring a perspective that must be at every table to truly effectuate change. Be brave, become an accomplice. Break down barriers. Change the board rooms, workplaces; include us wherever decisions are made. Equality should be everyone's fight.

Black lives matter ALL WAYS and ALWAYS. Every day, Black men and women have an influence on our lives. The traffic light, mailbox, dustpan, clock, almanac and ironing board are just a few inventions that were developed by brilliant Black men and

women. Let's not forget the Black urban planner who surveyed the land off of the Potomac River that would become our nation's capital, Washington, D.C.

Viola Davis recently shared a post that resonated with me. Viola stated, "A revolution has many lanes—be kind to yourself and to others who are traveling in the same direction." Our tactics may have us in different lanes, but know we are traveling in the same direction. Let's improve our city together for future generations to thrive and prosper. Say Her Name, Say Their Names, Black Lives Matter ALL WAYS and ALWAYS.

Danielle L. Bowers is a member of Harrisburg City Council.

Growing up in central PA, I was raised by a single mom after my dad passed away.

During my childhood, I had positive interactions with our local police department through their focused community policing efforts. I believe their efforts helped shaped my young view of policing. I did have to counter that, however, with a culture that spoke of doubts in trusting the police. I had “the talk” with my mother and uncles about how to “act” around police and white people. I was told multiple times about implicit bias and how that might shape my interactions with people, but especially those who are white. I may encounter things my friends may not just because of something I could not control, my skin color. The stark reality is that not all men are treated equal in a land where it is proclaimed that all are created equal.

When I attended a midstate college as a student, I had another experience. I was driving back to campus on a Sunday night around 9 p.m. I noticed, in my side mirror, red and blue lights. I wasn’t speeding, so I kept driving, thinking that the car was going around me. I realized quickly that I was being pulled over. The officer approached my window and asked for information. I gave it to him and asked him why I was being stopped tonight. He didn’t answer but instead began questioning me.

“Where are you coming from?” “It’s late, what brings you to the area?”

He then asked where was I going. When I answered that I was going back to college, he gave me a look that said he didn’t believe me. The next few words he spoke cemented my thoughts that I was trying to keep back. When I told him what college I attended, he sarcastically said, “Oh yeah, really?”

In my mind, everything my family and culture had ever told me about driving while black became real in that moment. I was scared. I thought, “How I can get out of here?”

I quickly blurted out, “Can I give you my student ID?” With my hands shaking, I found my school ID and handed it to the officer. He looked at the ID, looked at me, went back to his car, ran my information, came back and returned it back to me and told me to have a good night. He went to his car, turned off his lights and pulled off. I sat there confused and wondered, “What just happened?” I have shared this story with people over the years, including several in law enforcement. No one could provide a reason other than what I originally thought. I had never been so scared in my life.

As I recall that story, it’s amazing how God will use one part of your life to potentially set a course and use your experience to help others. I’ve now worked with law enforcement for more than two years. I have watched members of the Harrisburg police department run towards dangerous calls for help, observed them de-escalate very tense situations, work long hours to solve cases for grieving families, serve food to needy families and play basketball with kids. Many in law enforcement know there is more work to do to make our community a better place to live, work and raise a family in a welcoming community that we all want to see. I am blessed to now be able to help be a bridge and be a part of the change I want to see for our region. Everyone wants to live in a community where we all can feel safe, valued and respected.

Blake Lynch is the community policy coordinator for the Harrisburg Police Bureau.



Blake Lynch



Dr. Kimeka Campbell

Joy in Justice. It’s 2:12 a.m. My eyes pop open, and my heart begins to race. I immediately begin to think about all the things I must do. I start putting everything in order. Walk the dogs. Shower. Get to work. Attend meetings. Hopefully eat lunch. Answer emails. Make phone calls. Mentor my staff. *It’s only 2:15 a.m.* The other side of my mind is trying to remind me to... *Calm down. Breathe. Go back to sleep.*

But what about George Floyd? It’s okay, you can think about that later. *But what about Breonna Taylor?* It’s extremely sad. She was asleep in her own bed. *But what about Shaleek Moss?* Sigh. 2016 seems so long ago. Did we fight hard enough for him? *And don’t forget all the work that you must do in the community!* My mind races on.

This has been my life for a long while. But the persistent anxiety has never been more present and visceral than in the last few weeks. There is so much work to do in the community and so much that goes undone.

But during this resurgence of terror, pain and struggle—there is hope. As I continue my community work, I remember.

Working in this community gives me life. Keeps me sane. Brings me peace. And strangely fosters a sense of joy. It’s a joy that is rooted in the hope for a better future, and the hope of equitable life experiences for all people. It’s the hope that, as I am lifting up Black voices, Black struggles and Black experiences, that we elevate the conversation. That we lift up society. Because when we lift up Black lives, we lift up all lives.

When we lift up Black lives, we lift up all lives. The joy this refrain brings fills my heart and calms me down. I go back to sleep and rest to fight another day.

There is Joy in Justice.

Dr. Kimeka Campbell is co-founder of Harrisburg Young Professionals of Color.

I've been so many places in my life and times!
My journey includes three U.S. coasts and four continents. Since 2005, I have referred to myself as Harrisburg's "foster child." A refugee of Katrina, I fled New Orleans and was lucky enough to land here in the Rendell administration as director of cultural and heritage tourism.

Refugees are different than immigrants. We fled from one place instead of choosing another. Foster children are in a perpetual state of waiting for "a forever family." While I work hard to belong, I'm constantly confronted with the salutation, "You're not from here, are you?"

Fifteen years doesn't count! I know people who have been here five decades and still get the same question. You see, unless you were born here, you are never from here. You're instantly measured and identified by your church, the neighborhood you grew up in, or the year you graduated from John Harris or William Penn High School. You're constantly asked, "Who's your Momma? What lodge did your grandfather belong to?"

Foster children always have that lost look in their eyes. We are always searching for a sense of permanency. We're always looking for "our people!"

When I arrive in a new place, I always head directly for the town's MLK Boulevard. Every town usually has a roadway named for the great civil rights leader, right? Not Harrisburg. In fact, it's the only city I've come across that named a boulevard after the Exemplar of Peace and then reversed the action! The only evidence I could ever find of its existence is a disturbing archival record and a pile of signs in the back of a public works building.

As a Black historian, I'm always looking for the presence of the past. Where are the markers of the legacy of my people? Where are the symbols of our achievement against the odds? If you were born here, you might identify the few and vanishing markers of our heritage. If not, you're lost.



Lenwood Sloan

While working on a cultural project along the four-mile Riverfront Park, I could not find a single monument, plaque, bench or emblem of achievement exemplifying the contributions of African Americans. Walk the entire Capitol Complex, and you'll find precious few markers promulgating our presence there either!

But let's stay in the present! Where do you take African American tourists to discover Harrisburg's Black amenities? You'll find no thriving Black business district, no African American bookstore, art gallery, Black-owned theater, Afro dance center, literary society, public choir. There's no local Black baseball game to attend or marching band to fall behind. Indeed, when asked, the answer often is, "There used to be!"

"Used to be" is simply not good enough! Cultural identity is built on a foundation of brick-and-mortar institutions, physical signs and symbols which ground and substantiate it. Black-owned enterprises become the loom on which we weave the cultural and multicultural warp and woof of a people. They're the safe houses of our images, icons, artifacts and memorabilia.

I continue to wonder as I wander, where do Black people exist on the landscape of Harrisburg's memory? Where are the safehouses of our cultural experiences? Who's recording what it is to be Black in Harrisburg for present children and future generations? Who's building monuments to our achievements?

Martin Delaney, the great Pennsylvania abolitionist who fought for freedom with the U.S. Colored Troops in the Civil War, wrote, "Every people should be originators of their own destiny." Today and every day, we should work hard to pay it forward so that we have something to look forward to with hope and something to look backwards on with pride.

Lenwood Sloan is the executive director of the Commonwealth Monument Project. He serves as the governor's appointee to the Capitol Preservation Committee and board member of the Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation.



Yaasmeen Piper

I'm tired.

I was confused when they let George Zimmerman walk free in 2014.

I was broken when they killed Tamir Rice, who would have been class of 2020, just like me.

I was fuming when they shot and killed Antwon Rose II, who lived just a few hours from Harrisburg.

I was angry when they told us Sandra Bland killed herself.

Now, I'm tired.

Going to the protest on the Capitol steps and down the riverfront showed just how much our community is hurting. There were people shouting from the top of their lungs, declaring that their lives matter. There were kids, the same age as my siblings, holding signs saying, "I Can't Breathe." We are grieving the lives of all the Black and Brown people who were killed in the hands of the police, some right in our city.

But it doesn't just stop there. The Black community is too often forgotten in Harrisburg. We make up over half of the city's population, yet, far too many of our officials don't look like us. Far too many of the city's workers don't look like us. Some workers even refuse to live in the city out of fear.

We've been pushed out of our homes by climbing rent prices. Our barbershops and stores have been replaced by overpriced restaurants and apartments.

Even our news outlets portray us as violent, struggling and broken.

But Harrisburg has an incredibly vibrant community. There are so many Black-owned businesses such as La Cultura and Urban Snob that have given back to their community. Black-owned restaurants like Soul Burrito, Crawdaddy's and Queen's BBQ and Southern Cuisine. Even Harris Family Brewery for those who love craft beer.

We are organizing and supporting one another, especially in times like this. Now it's time for the people in power to do their part. If your hands look like that of the officers that took George Floyd's life, or 48 of the 49 presidents, it's time for you to speak up and help save Black lives. I'm not talking changing street names, marching with protestors for a few minutes for photo-ops, or kneeling in kente cloths. Actually do something that will invoke change. Call your lawmakers, donate to Black organizations, and support Black businesses. Lawmakers, draft and push for bills that will actually help us. If you have power in this country and want change, ask yourself: What am I actually doing for Black lives?

Yaasmeen Piper is a 2020 graduate of East Stroudsburg University, is a contributor and former intern for TheBurg and is currently serving a fellowship with Spotlight PA.



ENERGY & INTIMACY

Black musicians find a home at La Cultura.

BY YAASMEEN PIPER

Abanti Shelby



Around 2016, I became obsessed with Harrisburg's underground music scene. I loved seeing performers turn regular coffee and bike shops into concert venues, the thump of music spanning for blocks.

But, despite a few shows here and there, the majority of artists that took up these spaces were white.

That was until La Cultura came around. Black musicians quickly found a home in the two-year-old venue. Aside from hosting Black-owned shops and food vendors, La Cultura holds open mics and gives a space for local artists to perform.

"I feel like I'm doing its purpose. I feel so much aligned with my purpose and my vision on why I created this space originally," said Elyse Irvis, owner of La Cultura. "But, I can't take credit for the idea, just part of the execution."

The performances are curated by Raeshell "Shelly" Thompson, a local artist with too many talents to list. She started hosting the open mics in La Cultura last year and has since fallen in love with it.

"People pull up for this, people get excited for it," she said. "It's something that people can commit to, and it's something that people want to do, which also makes me happy."

DOWN FOR IT

Thompson was familiar with hosting performers before it became her regular at La Cultura. Two years ago, she hosted an event at Little Amps with her crew of musicians. The event was so packed that people were spilling out on to State Street.

"Because there's not a lot of space for us, it almost seems like when we do these events, it gets packed like that, because it's like 'Whoa, like, what's going on?'" she said.

For Thompson, it felt like there was a shortage of spaces for these musicians, and she wanted to help fix that.

Her first order of business when she returned from Howard University was to host an open mic.

She got her chance when a friend who worked at H*MAC came up to her and said, "Hey, we got a show coming up, and we just lost a host. Would you be down to do that?"

She was, of course, down for it, and loved the event. She loved hosting so much that, shortly after, she reached out to La Cultura to hold her own event.

Now, Thompson has a full cast of regular performers. Some of the frequent artists include her best friend singer Monica Cooper, Nick Bryd, Chewdo Ju, Andu "Geniuz" Desbele and his group Naomi17, among others.

Even though the energy in the space is large, the performers still feel a level of intimacy in La Cultura.

When Desbele is on stage, the rapper looks into a crowd of familiar faces, all within an arm's length, as they rap along with him. It feels like home.

"When you go there, it feels as if these are all your people," Desbele said.

CONNECTIONS

There are three rules of Thompson's open mics. All artists need to introduce themselves, everyone shows respect, and lastly, make a friend.

Not only does Thompson want to give opportunities for these musicians, she wants to help build connections and friendships between them.

Building connections is especially important for Thompson. In January, a friend of hers who came to her open mics was killed during a string of shootings in Harrisburg. He was at her event right before he died.

"When I think about that situation, I mean, it's a far reach, but he could have met somebody at this open mic that maybe he was out at lunch with instead of where he was when that happened, you know what I mean?" Thompson said.

So, bringing people together is especially important for her. The first 45 minutes of each event are carved out so people can get to know one another.

And it works.

"There's a lot of people I've met there that, now, when I see them out or on Instagram... my mind connects them to [La Cultura]," Desbele said.

Despite being in the midst of a pandemic, Thompson is still working to connect Harrisburg Black artists—just virtually. At least once a month, Thompson opens up La Cultura just for the artists and livestreams their performances for viewers.

While it's not quite the same as the live shows, Thompson and these artists are still bringing more recognition to Harrisburg's Black art and business scene.

"[La Cultura] allows us to be the face of the operation, as a Black-owned business," Desbele said. "Our face will be associated with this because we're here, and they won't take it. They won't ride us out this time." **B**

For updates on La Cultura's open mic events, follow them on Facebook and Instagram @LaCultura717. You can also find Thompson on Instagram @Shellyifyanasty. La Cultura is located on 214 Verbeke St., Harrisburg.

Photo courtesy of Jess Hoffman Photography.



Marisol Aviles de Ortiz and Hector Ortiz

ROOTED IN FLAVOR

Enjoy the tastes of Ecuador at Roots of My Land.

BY NORAH GRIFFITHS JOHNSON



The scent of warm, delicately seasoned rice and slow-cooked meat rose from the plate as I tucked into my first taste of *churrasco*. This traditional Ecuadorian dish features slow-cooked beef nestled in a savory, tomato-based sauce, aside rice, French fries, fresh vegetables and a fried egg.

I devoured my meal with ease. But the challenges faced by today's restaurateurs? Not easy at all.

This is certainly part of the story for Marisol Aviles de Ortiz and her husband Hector Ortiz, who opened the doors of their Ecuadorian restaurant, Roots of My Land, in late 2019, only to almost immediately face the pandemic.

"It's been very hard," Hector said. "All restaurants have been hit. The question now is for how long? Two months? Three months? Maybe six months? Nobody knows. But we are committed to keep going."

GOOD DISH

The story underlying Roots of My Land started some 20 years ago, when the couple immigrated to Harrisburg from their native Ecuador. Opening a restaurant was a long-time goal for Marisol.

"This restaurant has been a dream of my wife's," Hector explained. "We started this family business to present something that you cannot otherwise find in central Pennsylvania and promote the diversity of cultures, experiences and variety of dishes that the Latino Hispanic community offers."

Years ago, Hector and Marisol helped start the Latino Hispanic American Community Center (LHACC), located in the Allison Hill neighborhood of Harrisburg. They have long demonstrated their belief in working to make their community a vibrant place. This commitment continues today

and is evident in the couple's choice to locate their restaurant just one block away from LHACC.

"The only way to change communities is to support them," Hector noted. "By contributing to the economy in this community, we help show that this neighborhood is a place that people can do business and believe in."

When people enter Roots of My Land for the first time, Hector and Marisol encourage them to be adventurous.

"I challenge people to experience the pleasure of life by trying something different, something new—a good taste, a good dish, to take time to enjoy the environment, the food and each other," Hector explained.

"Believe me, if you don't like what you try, you don't pay," Marisol said, laughing.

But so far, she has yet to find anyone who fails to enjoy her food.

"If they try it, they *always* like it," she observed, smiling broadly. "And when you dine here, everything is fresh and made to order. That's very important to me."

THREE FLAGS

Hector and Marisol's enthusiasm for the food of their homeland is irresistible, so I had to sample some of their recommendations.

I tried the *arroz, jardinero y maduro*, which was a mild and comforting rice dish served with savory chicken, and the *chaulafan de pollo* (seasoned and sautéed rice served with chicken, scrambled eggs and vegetables). But my favorite of the dishes was the aforementioned *churrasco*. Seriously tasty.

I'm certainly not the only one who thinks so. Patricia Gadsden has dined at Roots of My Land several times since the restaurant opened. She mentioned a number

of dishes that she has enjoyed, but particularly called out the restaurant's preparation of a traditional seafood casserole (*cazuela*), and the *chaulafan de camarón*.

"Everything I've tried, I've enjoyed," she said. "And I *will* be back."

On weekend mornings, the restaurant serves Ecuadorian breakfast specialties, such as egg and cheese empanadas, a cheese and ham omelet and *bolón de verde*—a hearty treat made from fried green plantains and stuffed with meat and cheese.

"One or two bolón with a cup of coffee makes for an excellent breakfast," said Hector, grinning and clapping his hands for emphasis.

Last year, when the couple prepared to open Roots of My Land, they painted the dining room walls a vibrant azure and hung artwork from Ecuador. Marisol hand-painted three flags along the front of the main counter: the United States, Ecuador and the City of Harrisburg.

"This is not just about a feeling of pride, but about integrating our culture and food with the culture that is already here," Hector said.

Marisol shared her vision.

"These three flags represent what's important to me," she said. "The Ecuadorian flag shows our culture and heritage, the United States flag is for the way that this country gave us a second opportunity. And the City of Harrisburg flag is because this is the first city that we came to—we have lived here all these years, and I love it. Representing these three flags is very important to me." **B**

Roots of My Land Family Restaurant is located at 1430 Derry St., Harrisburg. For more information, visit www.rootsofmyland.com or call 717-991-6300.



Corey Dupree

THE NEW DEVELOPERS

In Harrisburg, African American builders are revitalizing neighborhoods, cultivating community.

BY M. DIANE MCCORMICK

PHOTOS BY DANI FRESH

Ask Corey Dupree what African Americans can bring to city development, and he says, “I love this question.” African-American developers “bring perspective” on the power of development to serve comprehensive needs.

“Our objective is to make sure these communities rise from, quote-unquote, ‘the rubble,’ because the phoenix does rise from the ashes,” said Dupree, a partner in the planned transformation of the former Bishop McDevitt High School into an eco-friendly complex.

African Americans comprise about half of Harrisburg residents, but they have traditionally “limited ourselves to a minority stake in projects,” said developer Ryan Sanders. But now, behind the plans for several high-profile projects are African Americans with ties to the city and commitments to community.

In the wake of nationwide protests demanding racial justice—and by extension, equal opportunity—these developers envision impact that goes beyond bricks and mortar.

THE PULSE

In Harrisburg’s Allison Hill, Tarik Casteel is building TLC Cornerstone Renewal, with 50 affordable apartments and townhouses and a community center near N. 15th and Walnut streets.

“I picked that area because it’s one of the worst areas in the city,” said Casteel. “I’m from the community, born and raised in Harrisburg, and I wanted to show that this can happen if you want it to.”

Casteel is president of TLC Construction & Renovations, and its nonprofit arm, TLC Work-Based Training Program. The nonprofit trains such hard-to-place people as veterans and the formerly incarcerated, hiring them for projects on the construction side.

“When you’re using these same people in the community, it gives them a sense of pride because they helped build where they live,” said Casteel. “When people take pride in where they live and pay taxes, they’re not going to tear up where they live because they’ve got skin in the game.”

In 2018, Casteel and his aunt, Juanita Edrington-Grant, imprinted the city landscape with the Harrisburg Uptown Building (HUB) with apartments for homeless veterans, plus the adjacent HUB Veteran Housing Campus. It’s about taking the reins and ensuring that the builders who build and the people who benefit “look like me,” he said.

Down in Midtown, Sanders is part of the team behind the planned creation of Jackson Square on N. 6th Street. The partnership, which includes NFL veterans and brothers LeRon and LeSean McCoy, looked at that row of deteriorating buildings with deep roots in Harrisburg’s African-American history—including Jackson House, a Green Book-listed rooming house that hosted legends of jazz and sports—and saw “a great opportunity to preserve culture and history.”

And then back at the top of Allison Hill, Garry Gilliam, Jr., is a partner with Corey Dupree, DeZwaan Dubois and Jordan Hill in The Bridge, a venture planning inner-city eco-villages, starting with the McDevitt campus. The idea emerged, in part, from the time Gilliam, Dupree and Dubois spent as students on the comprehensive Milton Hershey School campus, where they knew that the basics of housing, food, education and security were assured.

When those necessities are met—and The Bridge expects to encompass greenhouses, classrooms, workspace and recreational options—then people see hope, said Gilliam.

“I don’t believe you need to leave Harrisburg for that,” he said. “It can be done with mixed-use development, providing resources for those in those communities, and in a way creating a microcosm of Milton Hershey to break generational curses.”

As the new federal courthouse and state archives accelerate development pressures, the city is working with developers to “make sure that the first thought in new development addresses long-term concerns of the community,” said city Planning Director Geoffrey Knight.

Diversity among developers brings a fresh perspective to those conversations, Knight said. Many African-American developers have told him they’re striving for impact.

“It’s less of a focus on things that are financially viable,” he said. “It’s more of a focus on, ‘This is my community. This is a project that means more to me than just dollars.’”

Gilliam agreed.

“We’re of the community,” he said. “We’ve got the pulse of the community.”

NEVER LEAVES YOU

Development that expands opportunity in a traditionally neglected or oppressed community kickstarts change from within, Sanders said. African Americans in development also offer role models for younger generations.

“If we want them to do more, we have to show them more,” Sanders said.

Too often, Black youth see only athletics or

entertainment as their way out of inner-city neighborhoods, said Gilliam. Seeing adults succeed in other fields, including real estate and development, presents pathways to the full scope of careers.

Casteel positions his projects to create economic opportunities and to stand as showcases of possibilities.

“People need the opportunity to show what they can do,” he said.

To him, the HUB demonstrated that “African Americans can develop and build a good project and can work together to build their own community,” he said.

Indeed, the city “wants to hear from different people,” said Economic Development Director Nona Watson. Diversity brings people who have experienced discrimination firsthand—something that “never leaves you.”

“You want to give back in a way that will help keep other people from experiencing what you experienced,” she said.

Diversity “creates additional opportunities for individuals who may not have had opportunities to necessarily get into that field,” added city Business Development Director Jamal Jones.

“When you’re working with people who are the decision makers that are from diverse backgrounds, it provides opportunity to other people because there’s a certain level of understanding that there may have been—traditionally, historically—disparity in regard to opportunities. It levels the playing field,” he said.

FROM WITHIN

African Americans in Harrisburg development aren’t a novelty, Jones pointed out. Today’s big-project developers are standing on the shoulders of those who have made smaller contributions over the years.

“We should be at a point where this is more of the norm, as opposed to the unicorn,” he said.

When more citizens have access to education and jobs with livable wages, “you’ll see the byproduct in leaps and bounds, from more citizens that can contribute to your tax base, to bringing more people into Harrisburg,” he said.

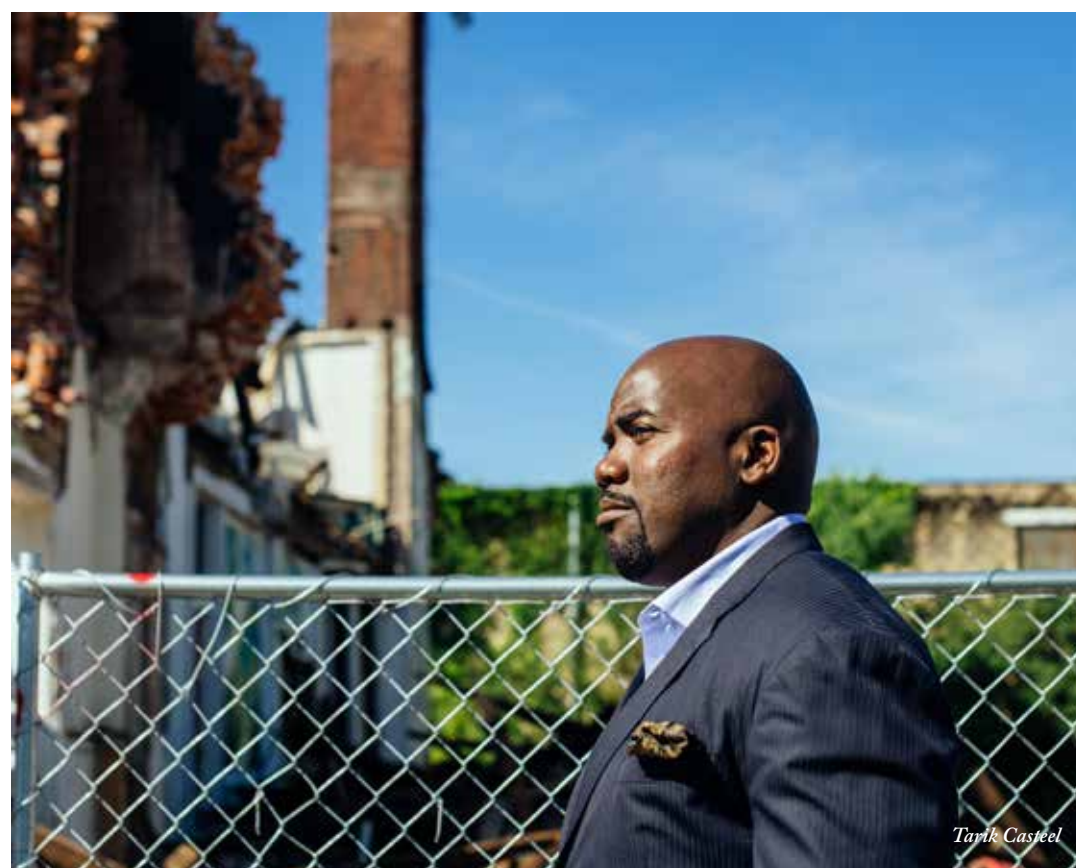
Barriers remain. Closed doors to the banks and networks that control the money and jobs. Decades of redlining that depress the value of Black-owned properties and curtails generational wealth. State contracts awarded to far fewer minority- and women-owned businesses than available, according to the Pennsylvania 2018 Disparity Study.

African-American developers say they are working around and through those obstacles. Casteel has built a strong network of relationships with trusted partners. Sanders’ funding sources include community-impact financial institutions.

“Economic development is one of the building blocks we need to address some of the systematic issues we have,” said Sanders. “I’m always for doing all community first, so you have enough individuals who are looking to do for our own community, and we’ll have the village that is needed to help produce the next generation of leaders.”

Dupree sees stereotypical views of Black men as intimidating or not knowledgeable. But when people realize they are savvy men who know what they want and understand what systematically oppressed people need, “that’s what is meant by ‘by the community, for the community.’”

“We’ve come so far, but we still have a ways to go to be able to have that equal access seat at the table,” he said. “I say it all the time. I’m proud of Harrisburg. When we say that Harrisburg is going to look a lot different in five years, we genuinely mean that.”



Failure to cultivate diversity among developers keeps a city from moving forward and prevents attention from reaching blighted neighborhoods, Watson said.

“Yeah, you have a thriving downtown area, but what happens with the schools, what happens to the neighborhoods?” she said.

At the direction of Mayor Eric Papenfuse, Watson is researching “gap financing” to help developers improve

return on investment for less remunerative projects.

In large part, African-American developers “don’t just do development,” said Casteel.

“We do community development,” he said. “We work with the community as a whole. Development isn’t just about building a house. You’ve got to build community.” **B**

THE SHOW MUST GO ON(LINE)

*This year, the Jewish Film
Festival will be streamed.*

BY BARBARA TRAININ BLANK

"Picture of His Life"



Saul Dreier and Ruby Sosnowicz view the world with love and joy—even though the nonagenarians went through the terrible years of World War II and lost many of their family members.

Relocated to Florida and devoted to music, the two best friends—a drummer and accordion player, respectively—formed the first (and maybe only) Holocaust survivors band in the world.

Their story, with its highs and lows, is told in “Saul & Ruby: To Life” by award-winning documentarian Tod Lending. It is one of the films featured in the 26th annual Edward S. Finkelstein Harrisburg Jewish Film Festival.

This year, viewers will experience something very different, as they’ll be home, not in a seat at Midtown Cinema. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the festival is streaming for audiences over a full month, from June 28 to July 30.

Lending brought a great deal of passion to his documentary.

“I saw a short, four-minute piece on Saul and Ruby in the New York Times ‘Op-Docs’ series and completely fell in love with these two remarkable men,” he said. “When I heard other production companies were pursuing the story, I immediately jumped on a flight to Ft. Lauderdale from my home in Chicago and met them.”

The filmmaker spent four years creating the 80-minute documentary—showing the band performing in synagogues and community centers, even at the Millennium Stage of Kennedy Center. They go on to fulfill a dream—to perform in Poland, where they experienced such horrors. In Warsaw, they draw a huge audience, including many Poles who rescued Jews during the war.

Julie Sherman, JFF chair, calls “Saul & Ruby” “triumphant and quirky.”

“The Jewish Film Festival always wants to make sure there’s Holocaust content, especially as more and more survivors pass on,” she said.

Other films will also address the time of the Holocaust.

“Those Who Remained,” “My Name Is Sara” and “When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit” explore different aspects of the European Jewish experience, particularly those of children. They represent stories of those who survived the camps but lost their whole families; children left on their own who survived by denying their Judaism, taking on Christian identities and hiding in plain sight; and those who became refugees when they fled in the lead-up to the war and had to learn new languages and embrace new cultures, finding the resilience to survive.

In addition, “Prosecuting Evil: The Extraordinary World of Ben Ferencz” profiles the man who, after witnessing Nazi concentration camps shortly after the liberation, became the lead prosecutor in the last of the Nuremberg trials. Now 98, he went on to advocate for restitution for Jewish Holocaust victims and, later, the establishment of the International Criminal Court in The Hague.

The festival, as always, includes a good dose of humor.

“It’s often difficult to find a comedy,” Sherman said. “This year, we found three, and we’re showing two of them.”

One is “Mossad!” a film of broad humor directed by Alon Gur Arye, about a not-so-bright intelligence agent trying to rescue a kidnapped billionaire. The consultant on the film, Israel’s highest grossing last summer, was David Zucker, creator of the comedies “Airplane!” and “The Naked Gun.”

The other comedy is the farcical “Douze Points,” in which a man chosen to represent France in Tel Aviv at Europe’s biggest song contest is thrown together with his one-time best friend, who is now a terrorist.

“If it doesn’t sound funny, it is,” Sherman said.

Another documentary in the series is “Golda,” based on a TV interview with the only female prime minister in Israeli history shortly before her death. Also included are testimonies by supporters and opponents.

Ten films will be presented altogether—two per week. Each will have a 24-hour screening period starting at 6 p.m., beginning on Sunday and Wednesday evenings.

“People can come and go as they please,” Sherman said.

On the evening that a film ends, there will be either a special event or what the Harrisburg JCC, the festival organizer, is calling a ‘virtual office cooler’—or Zoom discussion—for anyone who watched it.

“This is the only way to have so much of the communal aspect of the festival,” Sherman explained.

The JCC is not asking for money this year, but people can donate to the Midtown Cinema Staff Emergency Relief Fund on the website. They can also donate to the Jewish Federation Annual Campaign. Because the series is free and there will be no accompanying brochure, JFF is not giving credit to sponsors. It will have sponsors again next year.

Lending, founder and director of Nomadic Pictures, a documentary production company, is among the Zoom speakers at the festival.

“Before meeting Saul and Ruby, I couldn’t imagine a film that touched on the Holocaust because so many important works have already been produced on the subject in films, books, music paintings, theater, etc.,” he said. “But I think the film we made does provide a new perspective and experience to this remarkably important and tragic part of human history.”

Next year, Sherman said, she hopes the film festival will be in the traditional movie-going format at Midtown Cinema.

“Midtown and the JCC are really a good team,” she said. **B**

The Edward S. Finkelstein Harrisburg Jewish Film Festival runs June 28 to July 30. The festival is free, but viewers must register for their “season’s pass” on the JFF website at www.hbgjff.com. After registering, they will receive the film link. All information and instructions are on the website.