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SPECTRUM

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Spreading the News about People of Color

*Celebrating
Black History Month*

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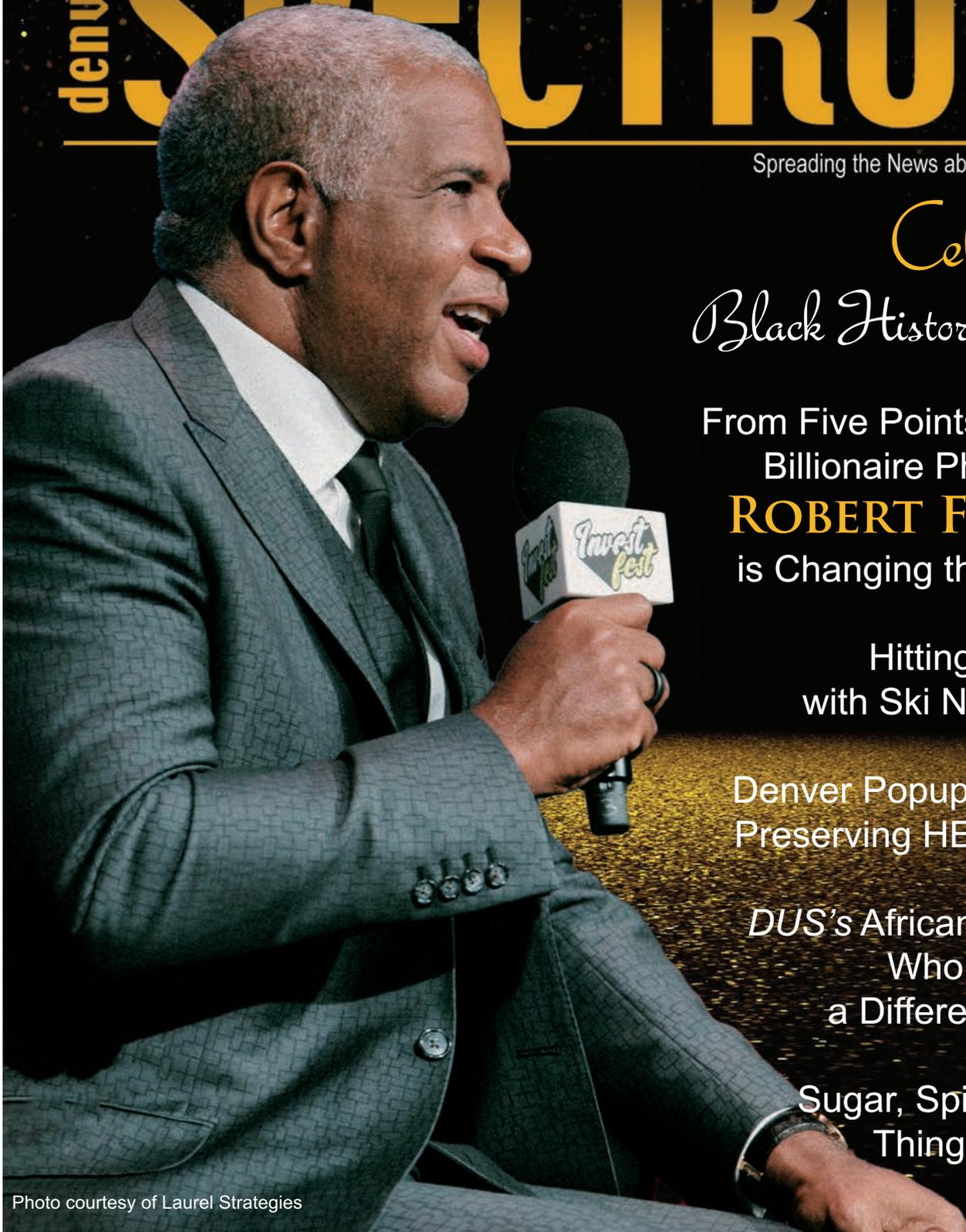
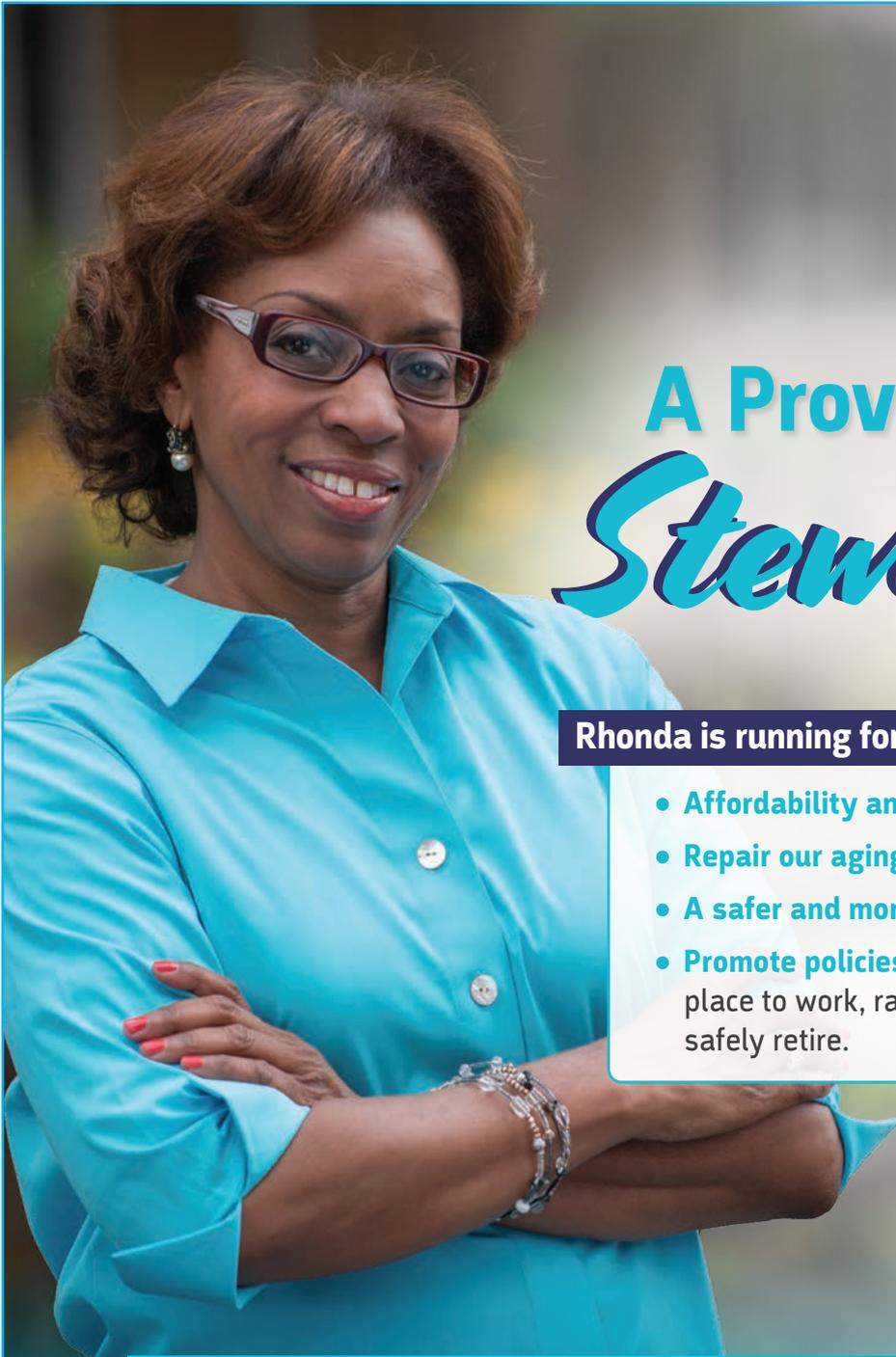


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MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

Celebrating Heritage and Culture...

Black History Month is an opportunity to reflect on the innumerable contributions made by Black people, from America's inception to now. From the time that Black men, women and children were carried across the waters of the Atlantic Ocean and forced into the barbaric practice of slavery, we have helped shape society through labor, food, spirituality, music, dance and education. We are innovators, who turned the nothing we were given into a glorious something – and that “something” is woven through the very fabric of this nation. Black History Month is more than the memorialization of civil rights leaders, inventors, trailblazers and public figures. Black History Month celebrates each and every one of us, and pays tribute to the living history of people working to create a better world. This month should inspire every one of us to dismantle systemic and institutionalized barriers to true equity, and evoke a stronger sense of unity and commitment to community.

Denver is home to historymakers! Robert F. Smith is the wealthiest Black man in America, and in this month's cover story you'll learn how the business tycoon's commitment to philanthropy is making history and changing the world. You'll also learn about the success and legacy of Reginald F. Lewis in “A Look Black in Time,” and the upcoming Rachel B. Noel Distinguished Visiting Professor, Cleo Parker Robinson.

The February issue features several organizations that are creating, preserving and expanding Black history including Ski Noir 5280, the Museum for Black Girls, the Urban Leadership Foundation of Colorado and the Five Points Business Improvement District. This issue also features a sneak peek at Makin' Cake, a touring production that discusses the bitter truth of historic oppression and modern inequity in a sweet, cake baking environment.

Each year, *Denver Urban Spectrum* recognizes historymakers in our own Colorado communities with the “African Americans Who Make A Difference” awards. This issue highlights the profiles of 16 men and women whose devotion to their community is a shining example of Black History in the making.

Please enjoy this issue and join us in celebrating our rich heritage and culture – this month, and all year long!



Ruby Jones
DUS Editor

PHOTO OF THE MONTH - REFLECTIONS ON DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.



Wilma J. Webb
January 15, 1981

Leaving the committee meeting after a 5 to 4 vote NOT to support the King Bill, with a tear in her eye, Rep. Wilma Webb said, “I will not let them see me cry.”



Wilma J. Webb
January 15, 2024
Photo by Gloria Neal

In below freezing weather at the 2024 MLK Parade, this image displays former First Lady of Denver Wilma Webb's tenacity that allowed her to get the King Holiday Bill passed in Colorado after a 10 year fight.

ROBERT F. SMITH: A BLACK BILLIONAIRE

Smith's legacy of equity, opportunity and advancement

By Ruby Jones

Philanthropist and deal-maker Robert F. Smith is one of the world's most prominent business leaders and the richest Black man in the U.S.. He has made history as one of the world's 14 Black billionaires – but more impressive than his ability to make money is his commitment to giving it away. The highly awarded tech investor has established a remarkable legacy of business innovation and continues to change the world with early childhood experiences as his guide.

The Robert F. Smith STEAM Academy sits just over a mile from the historic Five Points neighborhood in Denver, CO, where Smith was raised, honoring his enormous success and ongoing involvement in Denver area communities. During his acceptance speech at the 2023 George H.W. Bush Points of Light Awards, Smith recalled his life in Denver. “I felt loved every day,” he said. “I lived in a beloved community, where the people in our community cared about me and the children in our community. There were thousands of ‘Points of Light’ in that community. We had people in our community who taught us the importance of hard work and values.”

Born in December 1962, Smith's early childhood experiences were shaped by the caring members of a working-class community and a public school education. Yet, the education provided by his loving parents, educators Dr. William Robert Smith and Dr. Sylvia Myrna Smith, taught him the immense value of giving back. Each month, despite his family's financial circumstances, his



Above: Robert F. Smith speaking at Carnegie Hall Below: Robert F. Smith spending time with students. Photos courtesy of Laurel Strategies



mother contributed \$25 to the United Negro College Fund (UNCF), teaching him that everyone has the ability to make the world a better place no matter their status or stature.

“My mother was a great inspiration,” Smith said at the Points of Light Award ceremony. His mother also brought him as an infant to the 1963 March on Washington, where Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered the famous “I Have a Dream,” speech. Years later, for the 60th anniversary of the occasion, Smith spoke on the same steps as Dr. King. Philanthropy, activism and equity were ingrained from birth, and these values laid the

framework for a lifetime of achievement.

While attending East High School, Smith applied for an internship at a research and development organization called Bell Labs and was initially denied because he was too young. “The human resources director said, ‘No, you need to apply between your junior and senior year in college.’ So, I actually called her every day for two weeks. She stopped taking the calls after the second day, and I left a message. And I called her every Monday for five months,” Smith said during a speech at Code.org's Epic Day of Code. “And it changed my life.”

A FOUNDATION FOR FUTURE SUCCESS

After graduating from high school, Smith continued the internship while studying chemical engineering at Cornell University, where his commitment to community was further ingrained as a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. He earned a Bachelor of Science in chemical engineering in 1985 before going on to work as an engineer for Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company and Kraft General Foods. While at Kraft, he acquired two U.S. patents for coffee brewing systems, as well as two European patents. He enrolled in Columbia Business School and earned a Master of Business Administration degree.

In 1994, he joined Goldman Sachs, where he worked as Co-Head of Enterprise Systems and Storage for the investment banking, securities and investment management firm's New York City and then Silicon Valley offices. He became the first person at Goldman Sachs in San Francisco to focus solely on mergers and acquisitions in the tech sector, assisting major corporations with deals totaling \$50 billion.

Vista Equity Partners (Vista) was founded by Smith in 2000 and has grown into a leading global investment firm with over \$101 billion in assets under management. Vista solely invests in enterprise software, data and technology companies throughout the world.

GIVING BACK

One of Smith's most special attributes is his dedication to philanthropic efforts and actions that improve outcomes for underrepresented populations. In addition to making history as a billionaire, he became the very first Black person to sign the

“Giving Pledge,” committing to invest half of his net worth to causes that support equal opportunities for Black Americans and causes that protect the planet during his lifetime.

Founded by Smith in 2014, Fund II Foundation mobilizes his passion for his heritage and his desire to eradicate systemic inequity. The foundation provides grants to organizations that preserve the Black experience and culture, promote music education, protect the environment and correct human rights exploitations. “The whole inspiration really comes from an ideological position around how do you liberate the human spirit,” Smith is quoted on the foundation’s website. “I don’t think there’s anything more beautiful than the liberated human spirit.” Smith currently serves as founding director and President of Fund II Foundation.

Drawing on the value of education instilled in him by his parents, Smith has remained active at both of his alma maters throughout the years. He is a member of Cornell’s Engineering College Council and is on Columbia Business School’s Board of Overseers. Through Fund II Foundation and personal giving, he has also donated millions of dollars to each institution, including to scholarship programs for Black Americans and women studying STEM. In 2016, Cornell University renamed the school he graduated from to the “Robert Frederick Smith School of Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering” in his honor.

With education and opportunity as the catalyst for his success, Smith endeavors to extend opportunities to students pursuing college degrees. In 2019, he made headlines as the benefactor for nearly 400 Morehouse College graduates, donating \$34 million to cover the cost of their student loan debt and that held by their guardians. In 2020, he made a personal contribution of

\$50 million, matching Fund II Foundation’s donation, to Student Freedom Initiative (SFI). SFI provides mentoring, internships and other resources for STEM students at participating Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and other Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs), in addition to an alternative loan option to finance their education.

Additionally, Smith co-leads Southern Communities Initiative alongside Dan

Schulman (former CEO of PayPal), Rich Lesser (Global Chair of Boston Consulting Group) and La June Montgomery Tabron (President and CEO, W. K. Kellogg Foundation), a program for accelerating racial equity across six Southern communities that represent more than 50% of the Black population in the U.S. To promote equity, SCI partners with community leaders, companies and organizations to make progress in four key

areas: expanding minority business enterprise entrepreneurship and supplier diversity; upgrading the capillary banking system to provide greater access to capital; education/HBCU and workforce development; and bridging the digital divide.

Fund II Foundation hosts an internship initiative called internXL, which extends Smith’s positive internship experience as a young man to

Continued on page 6



DENPerks

SHE WENT HALFWAY AROUND THE WORLD TO OPEN UP A GREATER WORLD FOR ALL.

American flight schools refused to admit Bessie Coleman as a student, because of her skin color. That didn't stop her. Learning to speak and write French at night, Bessie studied instead in France where she became the first African American woman to earn her pilot's license. **DENPerks** celebrates the achievements of Bessie and all aviation icons of color.

SEE BESSIE'S STORY



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Robert F. Smith

Continued from page 5

others. "The thing that I look at that I can be best at is to enable opportunity at scale," he said during his Points of Life speech. "We have 23,000 STEM students from HBCUs and MSI organizations, with over 400 corporate partners as part of that initiative to enable the opening of the window of opportunity."

He went on to say, "My life changed through two internships... They provided a window into a world that we would not have seen in my community - business and commerce. Everyone in my neighborhood, they were small business people - they were the Pullman porters union; they were educators; they were teachers; small contractors - they didn't work at large corporations and were not able to enable a number of kids in that community to see what American commerce and trade really looked like. And that's why internships are so important."

BLACK EXCELLENCE IN ACTION

Creating a strong fabric for the American community is important to Smith, who encourages young people to build their communities through hard work and a commitment to education. He empowers young people to reach their potential, while inspiring them to integrate their skills into their work and become experts in their crafts. He creates opportunities for others to succeed, and his numerous accolades acknowledge the momentous impact he has made on students, small business owners and organizations.

In 2019, Smith received the "UNCF President's Award" and announced a matching gift for all the funds raised during the gala. In 2017, he was named one of Forbes' 100 Greatest Living Minds. In 2019, he



received the Carnegie Medal of Philanthropy and was granted an honorary doctoral degree from Morehouse College. That same year, he was inducted into the Texas Business Hall of Fame and made Bloomberg's list of 50 people who defined the year.

Smith was also named one of TIME100's "Most Influential People" in 2020. He also received Cornell Engineering's "Distinguished Alumni Award" for his philanthropic work and dedication to diversity in technology. In 2023, Smith was honored with the Founders Award from Foster Love, George H.W. Bush Points of Light Award and Legal Defense Fund's National Equal Justice Award.

Having broken records and creating a living history, Smith has actively supported the conservation of history, with substantial monetary contributions to the Smithsonian Institute's National Museum of African American History and Culture. He funded the creation of the Center for the Digitization and Curation of African American History, the Robert Frederick Smith Internship and Fellowship Program and the Robert F. Smith Explore Your Family History Center, which offers genealogy lectures and workshops.

"[These Centers are] a way of preserving our history for generations and ensuring that the stories of our families continue to be told generation after generation," he told the *Washington Post*.

Returning to the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in 2023 for the 60th anniversary of the March on Washington, Smith addressed the legacy of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and historical figures who contributed to the advancement of Black people since the Civil Rights Movement. He acknowledged systemic inequities that continue to act as oppressive barriers and encouraged the audience to use their voices to fight discrimination and eliminate the generational wealth gap.

"That movement has driven remarkable progress, allowing Black Americans to break barriers and build businesses, go to space and even occupy the Oval Office. And we've done the quiet work that's just as important - we're business owners, entrepreneurs, teachers and preachers, soldiers and scientists, farmers and firefighters - all shaping this country and its future. But the truth is, Black Americans are still held back - marginalized by public institutions and private corporations alike," Smith said during his impassioned speech.

"Dr. King knew that economic rights were the key to true equality. And he once asked, 'What does it profit a man to be able to eat at an integrated lunch counter if he doesn't earn enough money to buy a hamburger and a cup of coffee?'" he continued.

"Overcoming systemic oppression requires systemic investment. It takes more than a paycheck; it takes power and ownership."

WORLDWIDE INFLUENCE

Focused on making the world a better place for the next generation, Smith's philanthropy provides access to better economic outcomes, in addition to more favorable ecological outcomes that will ensure the planet remains livable for generations.

While Smith's professional endeavors take him all over the world, Colorado holds a special place in his heart, and he devotes a great deal of funding for environmental conservation to the National Park Foundation (NPF). In 2015, Fund II Foundation created the Fund II Civil Rights Historic Preservation Program in partnership with NPF. He also contributes to the development of parks throughout the country to expand access to outdoor recreational activities for children, people with physical disabilities and military veterans who have been exposed to trauma.

Smith is the Co-Founder of Lincoln Hills Cares, a Colorado-based organization that provides leadership development through outdoor education and the exploration of cultural history. Lincoln Hills, which was established as the only resort available for the enjoyment of Black Americans in 1922, has undergone preservation efforts that encourage youth and families to explore Colorado's great outdoors. Lincoln Hills Cares has served over 100,000 young people and partners with local organizations to create memorable Rocky Mountain experiences.

From colorful Colorado to his offices in Austin, Chicago, New York, San Francisco, Oakland and Hong Kong, Smith is creating change and making history as one of the most generous and prosperous people of our time. His early life experiences in a strong community environment created the foundation for his success, and his journey as a corporate phenomenon and humanitarian is a true representation of the American dream.

"The essence of America is a big heart," he says. "It is a strong community. It is a foundation of love, bound by education and opportunity." ■

Editor's Note: Learn more about Smith by following him on YouTube, LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter (X) or Instagram.



By Elena Brown

In thermodynamics, heat is expressed by the symbol "q" or "Q". Ironically, one of Colorado's most recognizable figures is also known by many as "Q" - but this Q prefers the cold.

Quincy "Q" Shannon is directing his burning hot passion for cold events into a tremendous effort to increase inclusivity in mountainous terrains. In 2018, the reverend, social activist and DSST: Green Valley Ranch Middle School Dean of Students founded Ski Noir 5280 to spark innovation and inspiration for mountain sports and activities among underrepresented - and often underexposed - groups.

"As president of Ski Noir, I work to introduce more new skiers and snowboarders who look like me to the sport, while connecting those who already have a love for the mountains," he says.

Shannon is a lifelong Denver resident who grew up in the Park Hill neighborhood. "My neighbor actually founded a local Black ski club called Slippers-N-Sliders, that was a chapter of the National Brotherhood of Skiers founded in the 70's," he shared with the Travel Noire digital media com-



pany in 2022. "From a young age, I was exposed to seeing thousands of professional Black people on Colorado's slopes. It wasn't until I was older that I realized I was very privileged to witness this."

Growing up in Denver's inner-city environment, he explained to 303 Magazine that his life could have been very different. "Drugs, gangs and violence were things that I had gotten used to seeing, and I was able to escape to the mountains where I had the clarity and vision to realize life was really something much grander," he said.



This year, the National Brotherhood of Skiers (NBS) will hold its 2024 summit for Black skiers in Big Sky Montana from Feb. 24 to Mar. 2. The summit is full of entertainment with a big, weeklong party featuring concerts, movie nights, apres ski (after ski) happy hours and races. Aside from the fun and winter games, the organization's mission statement is loud and clear: "To identify, develop and support athletes of color who will win international and Olympic

winter sports competitions representing the United States, and to increase participation in winter sports." Presently, the organization has 23 member athletes representing all four regions, including Olympians and Paralympics.

Ben Finley, age 85, helped organize NBS, and for nearly 50 years the group has helped people find their way to the mountain, learn how to ski and forge long-term friendships throughout an umbrella network of nearly 60 groups throughout the country. Eight of the ski groups are located in

the Rocky Mountain region, and four are in Colorado. Ski Noir 5280 is joined by the BIPOC Mountain Collective, Slippers-N-Sliders Ski Club and Ski Ambassadors of Colorado Springs.

Shannon understands the impact on the community. He represents a new generation of ski enthusiasts, and by founding Ski Noir 5280, he is working hard to encourage representation in the mountains.

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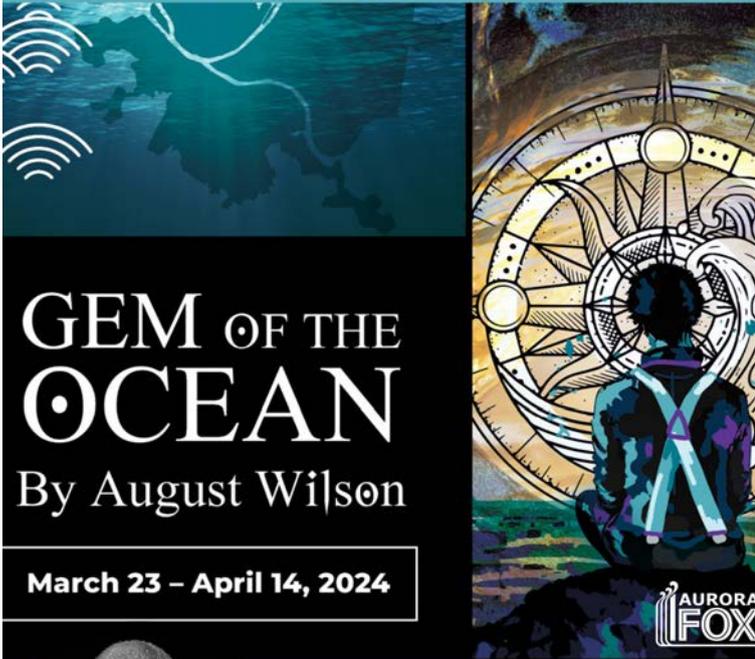
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Ski Noir 5280

Continued from page 7

However, he has faced many unexpected challenges, and even getting people to try the sport can be a struggle.

Participation in outdoor recreational activities underwent positive diversification trends in 2022, according to the Outdoor Industry Association's 2022 Outdoor Participation Trends Report. Covid-era restrictions may have played a role in the surge, as people grew weary of indoor activity and longed to get back outside.

In 2022, Shannon started a company called Neighborhood Uplift to respond to the increased desire for outdoor exploration. The company is developing a youth program to help introduce the next generation to winter sports, and is raising funds to purchase a charter bus that will improve access to the mountains.

With over 275 donations, Neighborhood Uplift is just \$45,000 away from its goal. Ski Noir 5280 has flourished with partnerships, sponsorships and grassroots fundraising and membership efforts. Nearing 100 members, the organization provides sponsored outdoor gear, discounted lift tickets and season passes, along with regular "Slide Thru Saturday" group trips to some of Colorado's best ski resorts.

Shannon's substantial vision is centered around finding new ways to share his lifelong passion for skiing with people who otherwise might not get the chance. He recognizes that socioeconomic status, race and transportation are all reasons why some people don't venture

into the nearby mountains, and he is working to overcome as many barriers as possible. He balances his love for the outdoors with his work as a community, spiritual and educational leader. As dean of students, he bridges the gap between students and administration, amplifying the voices of disempowered students while motivating them to achieve success. As Ski Noir 5280's president, he bridges the gap between the front range and the highest peaks, diversifying a traditionally homogenous environment.

"My gift is speech...voice... people hearing what I have to say. I am very much aware of that. So whether I am preaching a sermon, talking to a student, doing a poem nationally, or leading a march, it's all the same gift. It just comes out differently," he smiles.

For Shannon, love for people is the driving force behind his passion for advocacy; love for the outdoors is the driving force behind his passion for winter recreation. Ski Noir 5280 is the embodiment of both, and it's creating opportunities for all. ■

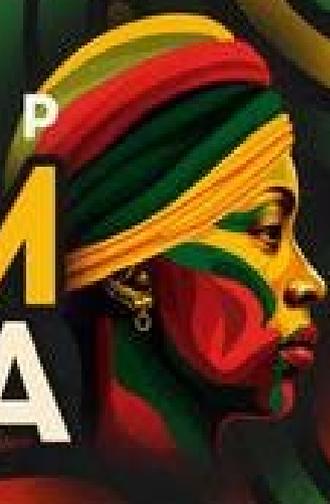
Editor's Note: For more information visit www.skinoir5280.com.





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The Museum for Black Girls

A Celebration of Black Girl Magic

By Brittany Winkfeld

The Museum for Black Girls in Denver offers an insightful and empowering experience. It is an interactive, celebratory space where Black women and girls are seen, heard, celebrated and given much-deserved symbolic flowers.

Located on the second floor of the downtown Denver Pavilions, the pop-up gallery serves as a valuable cultural resource, with an attention to representation that resonates with visitors from diverse backgrounds. Its impact extends beyond the museum walls, pro-

moting awareness and appreciation for local Black female excellence including the honorable former first lady, Wilma Webb, and dance extraordinaire, Cleo Parker Robinson.

The Museum for Black Girls began its journey in the heart of Denver in 2019. Along with her aunt Von Ross, Charlie Billingsley's inspiration and vision was to create a space that would showcase the strength, resilience and beauty of Black women throughout history. After being laid off from three jobs, she didn't know exactly what she wanted to do, but she knew she could do exactly what she wanted, however that looked. Since its inception, the museum has embarked on an evolutionary journey of seven iterations, making stops in Houston and Washington, D.C. Each location served as a testament to the universal importance of recognizing and celebrating the achievements of Black women.

"When I started this, it was not supposed to be a business. I was going to do a one-night event and here we are at year five."

Billingsley's creative dream has evolved into a dynamic reality as part of the Downtown Denver Partnership's Pop-up Denver program, which provides a central, accessible location for one year. This homecoming symbolizes not only the museum's roots, but also a commitment to build a sense of

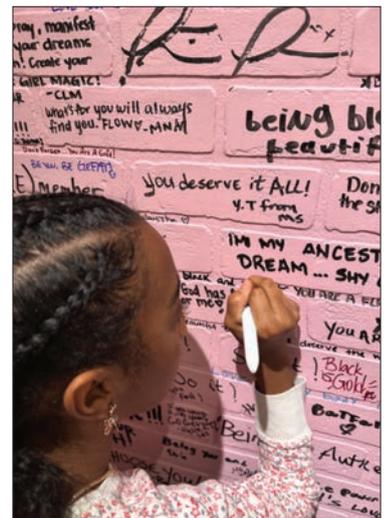


pride and belonging within the local community.

She describes growing up in Colorado, "We didn't have spaces for Black girls, so this museum stands as more than just a collection of exhibits; it is a living testament to the resilience, strength, and creativity of Black women. I believe that Black women are the foundation and blueprint of everything." Through art, history and culture, the museum invites visitors to engage with and appreciate the multifaceted narratives that define Black womanhood. "We evolve every day, and that's what I love," she says.

One of the many highlights at the Museum for Black Girls is the wall of affirmations. Guests are first invited to look at the "We See You" mirror. "We want visitors to see themselves as we see them - and that is beautiful, strong and courageous," Billingsley says. The mirror represents a powerful

force for change and inspiration. Guests are encouraged to write on the affirmations wall, and end their experience by writing and receiving a love letter to Black women.



The celebration of "Black Girl Magic" emerged as a powerful and uplifting movement. The term was coined to recognize and celebrate the unique qualities and achievements of

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Black women. It acknowledges contributions that paved the way for a cultural phenomenon that goes beyond a hashtag – it’s a mantra that highlights often-overlooked accomplishments in arts, science, business and activism. The movement behind the words seeks to break stereotypes, challenge societal norms and give a sense of empowerment and unity among Black women.

Many events, like The Museum for Black Girls’ Black Girl Magic Brunch, feature a combination of inspiring speakers, Black-owned vendor markets and interactive performances that highlight the diversity and richness of Black women’s experiences. Most recently, the museum presented a “Sister Circle” panel, featuring Charlie Billingsley, Breigh Jones-Coplin PsyD, Dianne Myles, Lesley Pace and Clare Sabon; hosted by Joco Blake. The panel encouraged open and empowering conversations about self-love, kindness, true sisterhood and the collective strength of Black women. Platforms for these conversations, whether online or in-person, foster a sense of community and solidarity.

The media landscape is gradually evolving to better represent the multifaceted experiences of Black women.

Recently, actress Taraji P. Henson expressed frustration surrounding workplace inequality and unequal pay in the movie industry. She acknowledged that increased visibility of Black women in diverse and positive roles contributes to reshaped social perceptions and promotes a more accurate narrative. During an appearance on the popular daytime television show, “The Talk,” Henson told fellow actress and comedian, Sheryl Underwood, “I don’t speak just for Black women; I speak for women of color. That’s why it’s important to have women of

color and diversity in companies.”

In addition to media representation, the “Black Girl Magic” movement extends beyond celebration to education, shedding light on the historical contributions and achievements of Black women throughout history. By learning more about the Black female experience over time, individuals gain a deeper appreciation for the magic inherent in their resilience.

For Billingsley, resilience laid the foundation for the

museum’s creation. “I am still learning the self-care journey,” she shares. “You think you have to be everything for everyone, especially as an entrepreneur, but being hyper-independent is a trauma response.” By prioritizing boundaries and delegating tasks, the museum has continued to thrive.

The Museum for Black Girls features a collection of local artists of all ages. As reflected by the museum’s “Our Story” statement on its website: “‘Black Girl Magic’ is more than

a buzz-word or trend. It’s the essence of Black women. The Museum for Black Girls is a space to celebrate this essence, as well as educate about the journey to our present state and liberation. Finally, and most importantly, this museum serves as a love letter to Black women and our experience.”

All are invited to experience the magic at The Museum for Black Girls. ■

Editor’s Note: For tickets and more information, visit www.themuseumforblackgirls.com.

25 REASONS TO GET A MASSAGE

- Relieve stress and anxiety
- Relieve postoperative pain
- Reduces anxiety
- Manage low-back pain
- Help fibromyalgia pain



- Reduce muscle tension
- Enhance exercise performance
- Relieve tension headaches
- Sleep better
- Ease symptoms of depression

- Improve cardiovascular health
- Reduce pain of osteoarthritis
- Decrease stress in cancer patients
- Improve balance in older adults
- Decrease rheumatoid arthritis pain



- Temper effects of dementia
- Promote relaxation
- Lower blood pressure
- Decrease symptoms of Carpal Tunnel Syndrome
- Help chronic neck pain

- Lower joint replacement pain
- Increase range of motion
- Decrease migraine frequency
- Improve quality of life in hospice care
- Reduce chemotherapy-related nausea



To learn more about massage, please visit our monthly blog on <http://atouchofdawn.com> or in The Urban Spectrum. Please take advantage of receiving a massage at a spa or from a practitioner near you. Or, feel free to contact us at the website stated above to schedule a session.


A Touch of Dawn



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Newman Center Presents: Joshua Redman

Acclaimed saxophonist returns to Denver with a new album & a new sound

By Justin Levy

Esteemed saxophonist, composer and bandleader, **Joshua Redman**, is not new to Denver music lovers, having released over twenty albums and previously winning the Thelonious Monk International Saxophone Competition. However, his return to the Newman Center's Gates Concert Hall stage on Friday, March 1 will offer fans a new wrinkle...a brand new concept album and live show built around a dynamic vocalist.

Working with Gabrielle Cavassa and brilliant support-



ing music partners – Paul Cornish on piano, Philip Norris on bass and Nazier Ebo on drums – the Joshua Redman Group has released its first album on the Blue Note label titled “where are we.”

Redman admits that an entire project featuring a melodic voice had long been at the back of his mind. “Doing a record with a vocalist was something I thought I’d probably get to eventually,” he explains, laughing. “But that ‘eventually’ was starting to sound like glorified procrastination or avoidance! Honestly, I think I was kind of torn. I’ve always had a sort of ‘rhythm

section envy,’ wishing I could be more of an embedded participant in an underlying, supportive groove. At the same time, I think in my primary role as a saxophonist in instrumental groups, I was used to being a lead voice, and I secretly didn’t want to relinquish all that melodic control! Maybe being locked down during the pandemic gave me time (too much time) to think about all of this. I guess I decided I was ‘ready.’”

It was Redman’s manager who gave him a tip on vocalist Cavassa. “Once I heard Gabrielle, I realized that she has an expressive quality and an intimacy and a vulnerability in her sound that is singularly captivating.”

The end result for fans, new and old, is a remarkable live experience and new album consisting of songs such as “Chicago Blues,” “Streets of Philadelphia” and “Manhattan.” At its core, the

album is both a celebration and critique of America; each song is about a specific geographical location in the United States.

The songs have shadings and alternative twists provided through mash-ups from different genres and generations. For example, the song “My Heart in San Francisco (Holiday),” features a taste of Tony Bennett and Thelonious Monk who each recorded their own take musically on the “City by the Bay.”

“The musical mood is primarily slow, soft, lyrical, and romantic” says Redman, “But also with darkness and longing and even sometimes anguish. I wanted musicians who were willing to embrace the beauty, the melancholy and the mystery.”

Music fans will find “where are we” to be one of Redman’s most compelling albums and live performances to date. ■

Editor’s Note: Tickets are available for purchase at (303)871-7720 or www.newmancenterpresents.com.

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Fulfilling The Dream of Dr. King

A Journey from "I Have a Dream" to Homeownership in the African-American Community

By Barry Overton

On the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in August 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his iconic "I Have a Dream" speech, a powerful call for equality and freedom that resonated across the world. This speech, emblematic of the Civil Rights Movement, sought not just political and social liberties, but also economic empowerment for African-Americans. Fast forward to today - this dream has woven itself into the fabric of the African-American pursuit of homeownership, a cornerstone of the American Dream.

I remember as a young adult, I felt I had an obligation as an African-American to dream, and more importantly, pursue my dreams. When Dr. King said "I have a dream that one day down in Alabama with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of interposition and nullification, one day right down in Alabama little Black



boys and Black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers. I have a dream today," he professed a dream so big in the 1960's it was likely considered unimaginable. Therefore, for me to dream of homeownership or fulfilling dreams in my life, seemed minuscule compared to Dr. King's level of dreaming. It created an obligation within me of pursuing every dream in my spirit. We all have an obligation to pursue our dreams out of respect for Dr. King. Let's look at how this relates to home ownership:

In the 1960s, the rate of African-American homeownership was staggeringly low, hovering around 41.1% in 1960, compared to 65.2% for white Americans. This disparity was a direct consequence of systemic inequalities, discriminatory practices like redlining, and a lack of economic opportunities. In contrast, recent statistics show a positive, though still challenging, picture. As of 2023, African-American homeownership stands at approximately 45%, only a slight increase and still below the national average.

Owning a home is more than just a financial decision for many

African-Americans; it's a fulfillment of the dreams and sacrifices of ancestors who fought tirelessly for equal rights. The ability to own property, once denied to African-Americans through various legal and societal barriers, is now a tangible representation of the strides made since the Civil Rights Era. It's an embodiment of progress, a symbol of stability and generational wealth and a testament to the sacrifices made for equality.

Despite the progress, African-Americans still face challenges in homeownership, such as higher mortgage denial rates and limited access to affordable housing. However, various programs and initiatives are now in place to support minority homebuyers, from down payment assistance to financial literacy programs, offering a beacon of hope and support.

In the spirit of Dr. King's dream, the journey towards homeownership is not just a personal achievement but a communal aspiration. It represents breaking cycles of pov-

erty, building wealth and reclaiming a part of the American Dream long deferred. As African-Americans continue to strive for homeownership, they honor the legacy of their ancestors, contribute to the economic strength of their communities, and pave the way for future generations to inherit a more equitable and prosperous world.

As we reflect on Dr. King's vision, we recognize that the pursuit of homeownership in the African-American community is more than a pursuit of property - it's a pursuit of equality, stability and legacy. In this journey, every African-American homeowner becomes a part of a larger narrative of triumph and resilience, a living testament to a dream that continues to inspire and empower.

Editor's note: Barry Overton is a licensed Real Estate with New Era Group at Your Castle Real Estate. He has been an agent since 2001, and started investing in real estate in 1996. For more information, email: barrysells-denver@msn.com or call 303-668-5433.

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This month as our cover story we feature billionaire and philanthropist Robert F. Smith and highlight the 2024 DUS African Americans Who Make A Difference. This episode also features The Museum of Blacks Girls, Black ski club SKI Noir 5280 and the national production of Makin' Cake.

Stream on kgnu.org and denverurbanspectrum.com

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African Americans Who Make a Difference

IN HONOR OF BLACK HISTORY
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THE 2024 HONOREES

- | | |
|------------------------|-------------------------|
| Antwaun Johnson | Krystal Ryan |
| Arvian Harper | Lisa Buckley |
| Bathsheba Walker | Micah Smith |
| Bobbie Alexander | Michael Atkins |
| Chevy Lowe | Narcy Jackson |
| Eeland Stribling | Pastor Vernon Jones Jr. |
| Javon Brame | Rodney Bates |
| Justin Alexander Adams | Yvonne Moore |

EMCEES:

Norma Paige & Quincey Shannon



SPECIAL REMARKS:

Barry Overton



REMARKS BY:

Topazz McBride & Jonathan McMillan



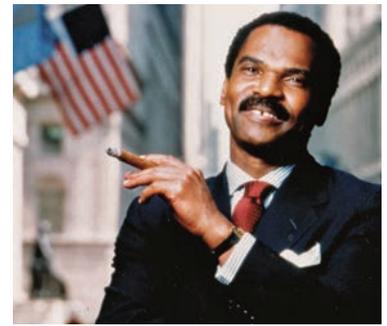
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REGINALD F. LEWIS: One of America's First Black Billionaires

By LaQuane Smith



As we celebrate Black History Month, it is important to remember the inspirational men and women whose footsteps blazed a trail for the next generation. This year, *Denver Urban Spectrum* remembers Reginald F. Lewis, a law professional and businessman whose hard work led to great financial success.

Lewis was born and raised in Baltimore, Maryland, on Dec. 7, 1942. He was raised by encouraging parents who instilled strong values and the desire to be the best at whatever he set his mind to. With an early interest in entrepreneurship, he saved his money and purchased a paper route, which he operated independently until selling it at a profit at the age of 10.

In school, Lewis excelled as a student triathlete. He was the quarterback of his Dunbar High School football team in addition to playing shortstop on the baseball team and small forward on the basketball team. In 1961, he attended Virginia State University with a football scholarship. Four years later, he was accepted to Harvard Law School's summer legal studies program. He was so impressive during the summer program that he gained acceptance to Harvard Law School before officially applying - a feat that had never before been accomplished in the university's 148-year history.

Lewis graduated and began practicing corporate law with Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP in New York

City in 1968. Throughout his law career, he worked with companies such as General Foods and AXA Equitable Life Insurance Company, and he served as counsel to the New York-based Commission for Racial Justice.

In 1983, Lewis established TLC Group, Inc. as a holding company for corporate mergers and acquisitions. His first successful venture was a \$22.5 million buyout of McCall Pattern Company, which he resold at a 90-to-1 return rate in 1987 for \$65 million. TLC Group, Inc. went on to outbid Citicorp in the acquisition of Beatrice Foods. Lewis made history orchestrating the largest leveraged buyout of overseas assets from a United States company; the \$985 million deal included 64 companies in 31 countries.

While serving as chairman & CEO of the new TLC Beatrice International, Lewis turned the company around, paying down debt and increasing the company's value until sales exceeded \$1.8 billion annually. In 1992, he officially became one of the first Black billionaires, with one of the first Black-owned businesses to generate over a billion dollars in yearly sales. In 1993, he sadly succumbed to brain cancer at age 50.

Lewis' success was earned the old-fashioned way - with hard work and business acumen that positioned him as a top-earner. He was a role model whose contributions to the financial world paved the trail for generations of Black business leaders. ■

Antwaun “X” Johnson

•President & Founder, BLACXERA

Antwaun Johnson is best known for his advocacy and activism within the Black community. In 2020, he founded a collegiate and community organization named BLACXERA (black-era), which has worked to increase inclusion and representation at Metropolitan State University of Denver while cultivating positive Black experiences for students.

Johnson is invested in political, social, cultural and economic advancement. He hosts events and programs that help foster a greater understanding of race as a social construct, and provides mentorship to ensure that Black college students obtain degrees with minimal obstacles. He is an avid supporter of local nonprofit organizations and their work to provide equitable resources to students and community members.

BLACXERA supported the addition of Juneteenth as a Colorado state holiday, and the organization’s support for the Colorado Opportunity Scholarship Initiative (COSI) helped provide relief to dislocated workers during the Covid pandemic. Johnson received the Stephen M. Hay Leadership & Activism Award for his work with BLACXERA, and for his advocacy on behalf of Black college students and the Black community.

Believing that the Black community would benefit from historical education and a greater understanding of political, educational and economic systems, he also recognizes the importance of Black Love in the pursuit of collective freedom and advancement.

Johnson is continuing his education, with plans to serve the Black community while pursuing his personal and professional goals. He wants to be remembered as a man of integrity and character – a change agent with a big heart, who cared about others and loved his community.



THE DENVER URBAN SPECTRUM PRESENTS

A | A | W | M | A | D

African Americans Who Make a Difference

Editor’s note: Each year during Black History Month, *Denver Urban Spectrum* honors African Americans who are making a difference in the lives of others. Based on recognition, number of times nominated, and service impact on the community, we have selected 16 recipients from 34 nominations as the 2024 African Americans Who Make A Difference. They told us about their achievements, what motivated them to become active in their communities, suggestions to address the challenges facing the Black community, and how they would like to be remembered. Once you read their profiles, you will understand why they were chosen.

Arvian Harper

- Chief Operations Officer, Sims-Fayola Foundation
- Founder & President, ALH Educational Consulting, LLC
- Founder & President, Awakening Enterprises, LLC

Arvian

Harper is a leader in education with over 15 years of professional experience within the Denver Public School District. She is passionate about advancing education and opportunities for children of color, with a personal mission to promote social justice, mental wellness and inclusive education.

As the Chief Operations Officer (COO) for the Sims-Fayola Foundation, she works daily to improve the lives and outcomes for boys and young men of color. Harper developed instructional training for the organization’s empowerment coaches, and helped transform the programming and mentorship approach into a curriculum that has an impact from cradle to career.

Harper became intimately familiar with deficiencies within the public education system while serving on the leadership team at Cole Arts and Science Academy. She supported teachers, helped to reduce student behavior incidents, led community engagement events and centered equity in instructional practices. This experience led her to create ALH Educational Consulting, which works with schools and nonprofit organizations.

Believing that the biggest barrier to the Black community’s liberation is



centered around education, Harper strives to support the youth with community programming that supports their knowledge. Her goal is to transform her holistic approach to instructional coaching to a national platform, prioritizing the self-actualization of children of color.

In her spare time, she runs a mobile espresso bar and bookshop called Awakening Cafe, specializing in housemade syrups and showcasing books written exclusively by Black authors. She wants to be remembered as a servant of the Creator, a mother and a champion for children.

Bathsheba Walker

- Executive Director, Moyo Nguvu Cultural Arts Center, Inc.

Bathsheba Walker is best known for her work with Moyo, a cultural arts center that provides quality, African-centered programming for BIPOC communities.

Moyo relaunched in 2018 and served over 200 participants with youth-led “Soul Sunday” events in 2023. The organization’s revival of the “Hip Hop Peer Leadership” program, in partnership with the School of Breaking, recently graduated its first class of Peer Leaders since the relaunch of its nationally recognized Rites of Passage program.

Walker’s focus on collective healing facilitates the curation of events designed to make community connections within and across cultures. She makes investments in the community, promoting self-care and culture arts pro-



gramming to ensure that families, elders and children have access to healing traditions and support networks.

She has positioned Moyo as part of a continuum of care to support the physical and mental well-being of the Black community. She hopes to see a reduction in violence, increased educational engagement, and the adoption of holistic healthcare practices that nurture the heart, mind and body.

Moyo’s studio space will reopen in 2024, and Walker is excited to partner with other organizations while expanding the program’s curriculum into the school system. She is looking ahead to the summer, with plans to operate programming rooted in Black and Afro-Diasporic cultural traditions.

Walker takes an active role in the community. She is invested in training youth and young adults to carry Moyo’s legacy forward, with the hope that their enormous success will make her contributions simply a footnote in a larger story.

Bobbie Alexander

- Special Projects Manager, City and County of Denver’s Mayor’s Office of Social Equity & Innovation

With over 17 years of public service at the City and County of Denver, **Bobbie Alexander** is best known for her advocacy and partnership with community organizations that support Black families. She has partnered with the Lowry Family Center and Epworth Community Church, and the Denver African American Commission. Her work with the Compassion and Choices African American Leadership Council supports end-of-life planning within the Black community, and she consistently promotes equity, diversion and inclusion in her professional endeavors.

During the past year, Alexander played an instrumental role on the Denver Black Reparation Council, which provides direct community repair to Black-led and Black-serving nonprofit organizations. She worked to rebuild and sustain institutions and traditions negatively affected by the oppressive aftermath of slavery.



She was part of a project team that authored Denver's first racial equity indicators report, "Equity in Denver," which raised awareness about inequities that exist in our communities. She was a conduct reviewer, who advanced former Mayor Hancock's vision to enhance public safety, and she remains committed to initiatives that promote equity.

Alexander recognizes affordable housing, economic inequality, health disparities, employment, education disparities and the criminal justice system as challenges facing the Black community. She aspires to advance initiatives that support the community's needs, advocate for policy changes and foster greater community empowerment in order to overcome these and other challenges.

She wants to be remembered for her dedication to the empowerment of the Black community and her willingness to address historical injustice.

Chevy Lowe

•Director, ECMC The College Place

Chevy Lowe works as the Director of ECMC, providing support for post-secondary educational planning, career exploration and financial literacy to students. She assists families with the navigation of the financial aid and scholarship application process, and created an innovative FAFSA Block Party to bring together various organizations in an engaging, fun and helpful experience.



During the COVID pandemic, Lowe facilitated virtual college tours to ensure that students continued to explore higher education options despite limitations caused by the shutdown. During this time, she highlighted the rich legacy and opportunities offered by HBCUs, and encouraged students to pursue an education at one of the historic educational institutions.

Accessibility is a main consideration for Lowe, who engages in initiatives that help bridge the gap between the cost of education and financial resources available to marginalized groups. She recognizes school funding, discipline and post-secondary counseling as areas

where disparities exist, and works with policy makers, school administrators, educators and community organizations to overcome barriers.

In order to empower students to forge meaningful career paths, she is committed to establishing programs that deliver comprehensive college and career guidance. She aspires to leave a lasting impression as someone who believes in the transformative power of knowledge to change lives and communities. Lowe wants to be remembered for her impact in helping students on their educational journeys.

Eeland Stribling

•Conservation Biologist, Wildlife Council Environmental Educator

Eeland Stribling is following in the footsteps of his grandfather – the first Black biologist for the Colorado Division of Wildlife. He works as a fly-fishing guide, who teaches students and families of color how to fly fish while providing conservation education in Denver communities.



Stribling visits schools in Denver, Aurora and Boulder to speak to children about wildlife and the environment. He has worked with Colorado Parks and Wildlife, the Butterfly Pavilion, Lincoln Hills Cares and other organizations to create an environmental education curriculum and provide hands-on opportunities for young people and adults.

In addition to hosting community events that teach people about conservation, he promotes representation in outdoor recreation and ecological industries. Recognizing health and educational inequity as challenges within the Black community, Stribling also sees underrepresentation in conservation as a challenge, and notes the interconnected impact of inequitable access to nature on wellness. He makes efforts to foster diversity in his field, eliminating financial barriers to activities like fly-fishing by providing gear to participants. He also promotes inclusive policies in governmental agencies to ensure equitable representation in decision-making.

Stribling is committed to hosting community events, advocating for policy change and procuring additional funding for conservation education throughout the community. He believes that opportunities to explore nature and gain environmental knowledge will contribute to the advancement of the Black community.

He is a comedian and conservationist who hopes to be remembered as someone who created safe spaces for nature exploration in addition to making people laugh.

Javon Brame

•Optimization Engagement Manager, CampusWorks Inc.
•Advisory Board Member, DEMI Fund Philanthropic Consultant

Javon Brame

is widely recognized for his impactful contributions in the higher education and philanthropic arenas. He has dedicated his efforts to the Colorado Community College System, championing the academic and personal success of students and employees from Denver area communities. He is a leading figure within the Denver African American Philanthropists group, and has played a pivotal role in supporting nonprofit organizations through strategic grant funding and development.

In the past five years, Brame has supported various initiatives affecting the Black community. He served as a founding board member for the Black Resilience in Colorado Fund (BRIC), which has allocated millions of dollars in grants to Black-led and Black-serving organizations. In 2023, he worked with the Collaborative Healing Initiative in Communities (CHIC) to introduce the Education Justice for Black Coloradans Scholarship, providing crucial support to Black students pursuing post-secondary credentials.

Following the guidance of the late Dr. Maya Angelou, who said "When you learn, teach. When you get, give," Brame holds a firm belief in his responsibility to leave the world in a better state than he found it. He plays an active role in his community as a catalyst for change, and works toward



creating an equitable landscape for the next generation.

Recognizing systemic racism, economic inequality, education disparities and injustices within the criminal justice system as challenges facing the Black community, he is committed to developing comprehensive strategies involving legislative change. He believes that collaboration between government, community and philanthropy sectors will dismantle barriers and create radical change.

Brame aspires to leave a lasting legacy, and to make the world a better place.

Justin Alexander Adams

•Reporter & Anchor, CBS Colorado Sports Broadcaster, Altitude Sports & Entertainment, Pac-12 Network & Mountain West Network
•Freelance Radio Talent, Holy Culture Radio (Sirius XM) & KOA NewsRadio

Justin

Alexander Adams

is a Denver native who graduated from Montbello High School and the University of Colorado Boulder. He is known for sharing stories about the Black community on television and radio as a sports broadcaster for Altitude Sports and a morning reporter for CBS Colorado. He is proud of his community advocacy as a youth mentor for Athletics & Beyond and After the Game ministries, and as a Christian, he knows the importance of serving people in need.

Adams lives as an example of professional integrity. He mentors young people who are interested in journalism, and contributes to non-profit organizations through fundraising and active participation. In 2021, he was nominated for the Heartland Emmy as a Sports Talent in recognition of his international work with young athletes and support for efforts to end human trafficking.

Understanding the importance of his role as a Black broadcast journalist, he is motivated to positively affect the lives of others. He gives a full view of the Black community and experience, rather than just reporting on crime and other negative issues. He works as an advo-



cate inside of the newsroom, highlighting the individuals and organizations that are making a difference for underrepresented people.

Adams hopes to write a book and develop a course on healthy relationships and marriage with his wife. He wants to be remembered as a faithful man who was dedicated to raising his family to be community leaders; and as someone who broke down barriers in the media space to make it easier for others to achieve their goals and dreams.

Krystal Ryan

- Certified Dementia Practitioner
- Founder, Beyond Blessed Ministries & Krystal's Hope Ride
- Author, Through It All: Her Story
- Host, Through It All Podcast

Krystal Ryan

uses her personal testimony to bring awareness to domestic violence. Her empowering story is documented in her book, Through It All: Her Story, and she is known for her work supporting people who have experienced partner abuse.



In 2023, Colorado's domestic violence fatality rate hit a record high for the second year in a row, and Ryan is working hard to reduce these numbers using her own story of survival.

She hosted Denver's first domestic violence awareness walk along with city and county officials, and in partnership with the Rose Anom Center. She also hosted the first "Krystal's Hope" motorcycle ride to spread awareness about domestic violence.

The October issue of Denver Urban Spectrum features a cover story highlighting Ryan and her story. She motivates others to leave unhealthy and abusive relationships by partnering with local churches and organizations to speak out about domestic violence.

Ryan's willingness to educate the community with her own experiences makes a great impact. For years, she has led support groups for women and always shows up as a friendly, non-judgemental, compassionate advocate. Recognizing that God saved her life, she wants to see other survivors make it out of life-threatening situations, and hopes that her work will

inspire others to create more resources for those who need them.

Ryan would like to be remembered for turning pain into purpose, and for speaking out boldly to encourage others to follow her example.

Lisa Buckley

- CEO, American Automation

Lisa Buckley

is a successful entrepreneur with over 20 years of experience. She is a founding member of the Colorado Association, and founding chapter president of the Airport Minority Advisory Council's (AMAC) Denver chapter. She serves in volunteer and executive board leadership capacities for the Hispanic Contractors of Colorado, Aurora Chamber of Commerce and the Society of American Military Engineers.



Buckley has supported growth opportunities for small businesses at Denver International Airport through her work at AMAC. She has contributed to efforts that boost minority participation in everything from airport concessions to construction. She has led the chapter's nationally recognized programming and strategy initiatives, and hosted the first Aviation Summit for business of color in 2023.

By providing jobs and economic opportunities to people of color, she is working to counter economic inequity. She believes that generational wealth-building is a long-term solution that will help the community thrive and not be at the mercy of political parties or elements out of our control.

Buckley also believes that it is imperative for young people to know and understand the importance of education. She stresses the importance of skill-building in order to be competitive in the modern work environment, build wealth and obtain assets.

Aspiring to build her company into the largest Black woman-owned security company in the United States, Buckley's goal is to hire over 500 employees while mentoring others who would like to start their own security or other companies. She wants to be remembered for always trying to help her community, creating jobs and providing economic empowerment.

Micah Smith

- 5 o'clock Anchor & Social Equity Reporter, Denver 7
- President, Colorado Association of Black Journalists

Micah Smith

is a leader in Denver's journalism community. She is known for her work as a news anchor on The Denver Channel, and for her social equity reporting, which highlights victories and barriers in underserved communities.



In 2020, Smith established a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee for Denver7, conducting diversity audits of the popular newscast, strengthening partnerships with Black organizations and increasing Black representation on-air. In 2022, she was honored by EW Scripps with the Leading at All Levels Award for her work on the committee; and in 2023, she was named an AdMonsters +AdExchanger Top Women in Media DEI Champion.

Upon her arrival in Denver, Smith was embraced by the Black community, which supported her with open arms and ensured that she was being treated fairly in the workplace. In return, she took an active role in the community, giving back to the people and institutions that empowered her.

Today, Smith serves as president of the Colorado Association of Black Journalists (CABJ). She is dedicated to the organization of service projects that allow Black journalists to pour into the community, and has re-established a scholarship fund to support the next generation of journalists.

Recognizing a growing trend of "diversity fatigue" following pandemic-era social justice protests, she encourages the Black community to demand that companies follow through with the diversity and inclusion statements released in response to calls for equality. She is working to increase CABJ's impact across the state, and wants to be remembered as a kind, dependable person who always showed up for the community, and a journalist who dug deep to uncover the truth.

Michael Atkins

- Principal, Stedman Elementary
- Director of Black Student Success

Michael

Atkins has been a lifelong member of the Denver Public School (DPS) District family – his DPS journey began as a student at just four years old before he went on to work as a custodian, paraprofessional, teacher and assistant principal. Now, Atkins is principal of Stedman Elementary and the new Director of Black Student Success. His goal is to ensure positive student and educator experience in an increasingly diverse environment.



Atkins works to build educator's capacity through diversity, equity and inclusion development training. He strives to dispel social norms that lead to unfair labels and poor treatment of students in academic settings.

Recognizing that school is an entry point to a child's future success, he does his best to make sure that students are seen, heard and feel safe.

With outdated policies built on institutionalized racism, Atkins takes an active role in his community, working with policymakers to reform political and educational systems. His goal is to create safe spaces for children who look like him, ensuring that they have access to opportunities within DPS.

Atkins wants to be remembered as a man who embraced his lived experiences to create a path for Black youth to overcome adversity through perseverance. He encourages young people to work toward creating a better world, and urges them not to let anyone define their story or discourage them. "They handed me a broom and I turned it into a school. Turn your broom into something special," he says.

Narcy Jackson

•Executive Director, Athletics & Beyond Family Wellness Center

Coach Narcy

Jackson is best known for his role in the implementation of youth mentorship programs with Athletics & Beyond (A&B) Family Wellness Center. He supports the community of Montbello and serves over 635 clients with sports programs, free meals, toy drives, holiday events and a summer STEM program.

Since 2005, Jackson has helped to facilitate A&B's growth and operations while providing community resources in a safe environment. What started as a community-based nonprofit has grown into a community center and hub that employs past program participants and members of Denver's Black community. He is excited about the launch of a new capital campaign – with a \$3 million goal – that will assist in the purchase of a building where the organization can continue to work toward economic independence and wealth building for the community it serves.

Recognizing opportunities for greater access and inclusion in city infrastructure, he would like to see more grassroots and community-led BIPOC organizations obtain access to city funding and reimbursement programs. He believes that having relationships with financial institutions plays an important role in helping organizations and individuals achieve economic equity, and he focuses on financial and business education to create better outcomes.

Jackson is motivated to help young people pursue entrepreneurship as an avenue to greater equity and inclusion. He would like to be remembered as someone who cares about his commu-



nity and the future of young people. He is proud of the fact that A&B stopped asking for a seat at the table and instead built its own.

Pastor Vernon Jones Jr.

•Executive Leader, FaithBridge
•Pastor, United Church of Montbello

Pastor

Vernon Jones Jr. is a husband, father and grandfather who provides spiritual and community leadership throughout the Denver Metropolitan area. As an executive leader at FaithBridge, he works with the United Church of Montbello, Kinship Church, Church in the City, and provides educational support to youth across multiple school districts.

Jones believes that the way society treats children and elders speaks to its alignment with God. He works to show his own personal alignment through service and leadership in churches, schools, nonprofit organizations and volunteer board service. He often encounters former students and people who he has mentored and coached – he enjoys seeing their smiles! He recognizes that their lives affirm his efforts to speak life into everyone he encounters.

Acknowledging the structural and systemic inequities plaguing our community, Jones believes that people should encourage one another and lean in with love to support each other. He believes that love is greater than any challenge, and that everyone has a responsibility to motivate community members to keep striving for change.

While he has a lot of hopes and dreams, he is satisfied with being a planter who trusts God for the harvest. He wants to see his faith community celebrate the achievement of lofty goals to expand services and increase reach.



Jones wants to be remembered as a man who loved God, loved his family and loved his community. He is faithful to his work, and his impact in the community begins with his intentionality at home.

Rodney Bates

•School Lead, Struggle of Love Foundation
•Executive Director, BlackHawks Youth Organization

Rodney Bates

is known for his community involvement. He serves as vice president of the Denver NAACP, and implements the Struggle of Love Mentoring and Leadership program at local schools. Additionally, he helps young women showcase their basketball talent on a national level through the Lady BlackHawks Club Basketball Program.

Bates was raised to value community outreach and leadership; he follows the example of his mother, who instilled the importance of giving back. Today, he devotes his time to creating solutions to various challenges in the community.

As a member of Denver's NAACP chapter, Bates works toward the advancement of the Black community through programs and initiatives that support political, economic and social equity. He helps guide national directives on a local level, and supports businesses and individuals by removing barriers caused by racial discrimination.

Recognizing trust and unity as some of the areas where the Black community needs to improve, he believes that by being more transparent and unifying efforts, we can overcome and repair severed relationships.

Lack of access to community resources is one of the issues Bates is working to address. He has aspirations of owning a facility that would provide



services for youth and adults, and believes that extended hours and fewer restrictions would create a strong positive impact.

Yvonne Moore

•Founder & Managing Director, Moore Philanthropy
Philanthropic Advisor

Yvonne

Moore is dedicated to building the wealth and influence of communities of color through the establishment of a Black-led, woman-founded philanthropic firm. Moore Philanthropy has raised \$30 million to help changemakers tackle challenges impacting their communities, distributing \$26 million in grant funds to overlooked regions.

Moore has served as a member of the board of directors for prominent organizations such as The New York Women's Foundation and Comic Relief US. She currently serves as the chairperson for the Building Resilience in Colorado (BRIC) Fund Advisory Board. In this capacity, she has helped direct \$2.4 million to initiatives that combat systemic racism in Colorado's Black communities.

Driven by a family legacy of philanthropy and a commitment to social justice, she desires to help communities of color embrace their philanthropic power. She recognizes community-wide underinvestment as a challenge, and is striving to counter the number of underfunded Black-led enterprises with collective wealth, leadership and innovation.

Moore Philanthropy is positioned to enhance BIPOC wealth and influence by dismantling barriers and advancing justice movements. With financial support to bolster leadership efforts, she hopes to increase investments in communities of color and create favorable economic outcomes for the next generation.

Moore believes that her legacy will embody her deep commitment to empowering underrepresented communities with strategic, impactful philanthropy. She wants to be remembered as someone who uplifted the community and inspired others to reach their full potential while advocating for economic, social and racial justice. ■



Congratulations to Denver Urban Spectrum's
2024 African Americans Who Make A Difference

Urban Leadership Foundation of Colorado Appoints First Full-Time President and CEO



For the first time in its 17-year journey, the Urban Leadership Foundation of Colorado (ULFC) is adopting a new leadership model. As of Jan. 1, Dr. Ryan Ross, who previously led the organization in a volunteer capacity, is now ULFC's full-time president and chief executive officer (CEO).

Founded in 2007 by visionary business leader Richard Lewis, former Senator Angela Williams and Denver's first Black mayor, the Honorable Wellington E. Webb who refers to Ross as family and is a leader of the next generation, ULFC has emerged as a premier leadership organization. Dedicated to the development of Black and African emerging leaders, the organization actively engages in impactful community service projects.

Under Ross's leadership, ULFC has achieved remarkable milestones, graduating nearly 500 participants, contributing important resources to the community, awarding \$300,000 in scholarships to fellows and successfully completing over 40 community service projects in the metro Denver area.

Expressing enthusiasm about Ross's new role, ULFC Board Chair David Allen stated, "We

are thrilled to have Dr. Ross as a full-time leader of the organization. His accomplishments as a volunteer assure us that, in this capacity, he will take ULFC to unimaginable heights. Dr. Ross is talented, smart, innovative, and has the ability to bring out the best in others. We are excited about the future impact on the community."

Ross, with over 20 years of experience in higher education, most recently served as the associate vice president for student affairs, equity, and inclusion for the Colorado Community College System (CCCS). Despite leaving a prominent role in higher education, He sees this move as a natural progression, stating, "This opportunity will better prepare me to serve as a college president one day, and allow me to make an impact on my community today. It's a calling, and my purpose at this point in my life." He emphasized the importance of serving the community, investing in community well-being and contributing to the diversification of boards and leadership positions that have traditionally lacked equitable representation.

Reflecting on what the role means to him, Ross shared, "Leaders have a responsibility to mentor, bring people along, prop people up and move with an unselfish concern for the welfare of others. This role embodies all of those things and more."

ULFC's mission is to serve as an opportunity catalyst, accelerating economic, social and professional vitality through direct investment in the endeavors of its members. The organization focuses on Black professionals, youth and community well-being. Its core values include

elevating Black excellence, transformative civic engagement and honoring the right to thrive.

Ross has received several accolades, including being named a 9News Leader of the Year. He also received an "MLK Jr. Humanitarian Award," from the Colorado Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Commission.

Mayor Webb, a mentor to Ross, expressed pride, stating, "We need to support the next generation of leaders, and I commend Ryan for answering this call to intentionally build our community. The impact of the [ULFC] is phenomenal, and we must stand behind Ryan to ensure it only gets more impactful and phenomenal by the day." He emphasized his hope for the business and philanthropic community to stand behind Ross and ULFC, further sharing, "It's like building a cham-

pionship basketball team, once you have a great coach place you have to invest the resources necessary to ensure the players have what they need to win. It's already been demonstrated that when ULFC wins, so does the entire community. Let's rally around this."

In a world where leadership is crucial, the ULFC board's appointment of a full-time president and CEO signifies a commitment to fostering the next generation of leaders and creating a positive impact on the community. ■

Editor's Note: To learn more about ULFC visit www.ulfcolorado.org.



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**Cleo Parker Robinson named 2024 Rachel
B. Noel Distinguished Visiting Professor**

By Ruby Jones

From March 10 to 12, Metropolitan State University of Denver will host world-renowned dancer, choreographer and artistic director, Cleo Parker Robinson, as its 2024 Rachel B. Noel Distinguished Visiting Professor.



was appointed by President Bill Clinton to the National Council of the Arts, and she was inducted into the Colorado Women's Hall of Fame in 1989.

Named for Colorado Women's Hall of Fame inductee, Rachel B. Noel, the Distinguished Visiting Professorship was established in 1981 to pay tribute to the trailblazing educator and activist who fought to integrate Denver schools. It celebrates multiculturalism and diversity, inviting distinguished artists and public figures to conduct classes, performances and lectures for MSU students, faculty and community members. Campus and community events, including "Hope for the Future" awards and scholarship presentations, honor Noel's legacy of equity and academic excellence.

Like Noel, Robinson uses education to break down barriers caused by prejudice and systemic inequity.

Noel, born Rachel Bassette, was born in 1918 in Hampton, Virginia. She graduated magna cum laude from Hampton University before earning a master of sociology degree from Fisk University. She and her husband, Edmond F. Noel, moved to Denver in 1949.

Robinson embodies multiculturalism, diversity and community leadership. She began dancing at the University of Colorado at age 15, and founded her own company, Cleo Parker Robinson Dance (CPRD), in 1970.

In Denver, her daughter was prevented from joining an all-white Girl Scouts troop so Noel helped create statewide integration. When her children were transferred from their neighborhood school to smaller, poorly funded schools, she discovered that the Denver Public School (DPS) District was practicing segregative redistricting, and she was determined to fight educational injustice.

For over 50 years, CPRD has been a fixture within the Denver community. Robinson, who leads professional dance ensembles for youth and adults, also hosts international dance institutes and school-based dance programs. She has taught and performed dance in Iceland, Singapore, Hawaii, Belize, Egypt, Turkey and throughout the African and European continents.

In 1965 she was elected to the Denver Public Schools Board of Education, becoming the first Black person to be elected to a Colorado public office. She introduced a resolution to integrate schools before leaving DPS to teach sociology and African American Studies at MSU. She served as head of the African American Studies department, and later earned a seat as the first Black woman on the University of Colorado Board of Regents.

People of all ages and backgrounds have benefited from Robinson's influence and artistic inspiration, and she has been highly awarded for her ongoing efforts to extend dance education to under-represented groups. In 1998, she

The Rachel B. Noel Distinguished Visiting Professorship was created to highlight the importance of diversity, and the multicultural influence of Robinson's choreographic mastery is a perfect example of how diversity makes the world a better – and more beautiful – place. ■

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Makin' Cake

By Stacy Narine & Ruby Jones



From poetry to production, Dasha Kelly-Hamilton does it all. She is an author and advocate, who uses creative outlets to share messages about equity and advancement. Her latest production, *Makin' Cake*, will be held live at Northglenn Arts' Parsons Theatre on Saturday, Feb. 24, at 7:30 p.m. The show will explore American history, race, culture and class, and will feature a special guest appearance from renowned dancer and choreographer, Cleo Parker Robinson.

The idea and premise for *Makin' Cake* stems from Kelly-Hamilton's desire to create a safe space for people from all walks of life to engage in conversation about differing sociological experiences. She constructed a creative storyline around the analogy of baking a cake, with each ingredient representing inequitable privileges only available to a few and not the whole of humanity.

At one point in time, sugar was only afforded to the wealthy. The time it took to bake a cake was only available to those who were not tending someone else's land. People who did not own domestic animals were unable to produce the dairy that was churned into

butter. Making cake was, in fact, a luxury.

"We've always had cake. Cake just hasn't been possible... for everyone," says Kelly-Hamilton, who points out that historically, most American residents have struggled to afford basic ingredients to make the dessert that has become commonplace with changing economic and social landscapes.

Each ingredient and its symbolic representation reflects a story steeped in cultural history, which Kelly-Hamilton has arranged into a unique conversation of racism and classism. The bitter elements are softened by the quasi-correlative process of baking a confectionary favorite.

With discussions about red velvet cake, chocolate devil's food cake, honey cake, apple-sauce cake, ash cake, pineapple upside down cake, johnny cake, apple crisps and even the illustrious Baked Alaska, there are lessons about the formation of our great nation, changing social standards and economic trends. Each social shift required care, just like a cake's assembly requires caution to avoid underbaking, overbaking or one of many chemical catastrophes affecting the entire structure. The presentation features an exploration of the way race, culture and class have affected the country's structure and the role they've each played in our lives today.

"There's a sweetness in being able to have a tough conversation this way," states the cake enthusiast, who will appear on stage with pre-selected bakers.

As the production tours, two bakers from each city will be selected to join her on stage. In some cities, the bakers will be amateurs; in other cities, they will be bakery owners and cake aficionados. Throughout the show, they will mix, measure and blend ingredients while Kelly-Hamilton gives an oratorical presentation about equity in America. As the audience

watches the construction of tasty dessert, Kelly-Hamilton's storytelling will dive deep, with lessons that combine historical and social science revelations. Though the topics will remain the same in each city, the conversations unfold differently with each new audience.

With so much happening on stage during the production, a team effort is required to prepare the set and avoid kitchen mishaps. The crew – including Kelly-Hamilton's husband who facilitates the baking scenes – and the exceptional technical team all work to make sure all the pieces are in place while the creator takes center stage.

The Makin' Cake audience is in for a treat. After the ingredients are perfectly blended in the first half of the performance, the second half features an interactive conversation where audience members can talk about what they heard, how they felt, and what questions they have. With a new understanding of how history plays a role in modern relationships and experiences, each member of the audience has an opportunity to contribute to the conversation from their own perspective.

"Being able to be a part of this is always special," says Kelly-Hamilton. "You have these different life experiences that are going to be represented in the audience, and people always have different reactions; but the flow is familiar."

Underneath the lighthearted theme of baking a cake, her real-life stories and serious scenarios have a strong impact that permeates the hearts of spectators.

"It's a shared experience, so there's a feeling of openness. At the end of the performance, the whole audience has gone through something together and there are a lot of emotions when you're talking about something difficult." For Kelly-Hamilton, the conversations

that occur after the performance are meaningful and provide an authentic ending to a powerful moment in time.

She refers to herself as a creative change agent, with tools to unravel unconscious bias and underlying prejudice through performance. "I contribute – as a whole – for our kids to be better now and in the future. That's my living contribution," she says.

As Makin' Cake continues to tour throughout the United States, Kelly-Hamilton is excited for opportunities to present her work in new cities, building partnerships with new audiences and bakers from coast to coast.

Makin' Cake is a story about history and humanity, recovery and redemption. It's the bitter with the sweet, and it's makin' its way to the front range.

Editor's note: For tickets and more information, visit www.NorthglennArts.org.

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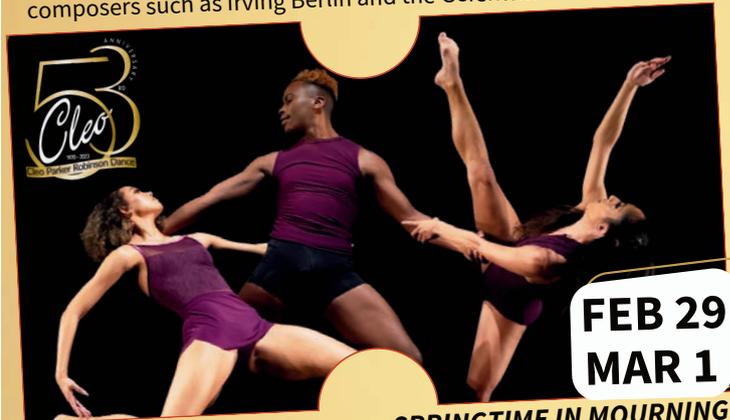
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FEB
24



MAKIN' CAKE

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Norman T. Harris Named Executive Director of the Five Points Business Improvement District



The Five Points Business Improvement District (BID) Board of Directors is thrilled to announce Norman T. Harris as the new Executive Director of the Five Points Business

Improvement District. Harris will be taking over the management duties of the BID from the Downtown Denver Partnership (DDP).

Recognizing the changing needs of the Five Points Business Improvement District, the BID Board initiated the search for a full-time executive director dedicated to being in the corridor and overseeing the necessary services that were previously managed by the DDP.

“Norman has a deep history and strong connections within the Five Points community, and his numerous positive contributions to the neighborhood, including launching initiatives like the Juneteenth Music Festival, make him an exceptional choice for the Executive

Director position,” said Haroun Cowans, Five Points Business Improvement District Board Chair. “In addition to his technical expertise, Harris’ leadership and unwavering dedication to this district will provide the corridor with incredible opportunities for success, benefiting both the BID and the Five Points community.”

Born and raised in Denver, Harris attended Colorado Academy and Colorado State University. Currently, Harris is part owner of the Five Points Spangalang brewery, and he serves as managing partner of The Holleran Group, an urban land development company. He is also the executive director of JMF Corporation and the founder of Mile High Festivals,

an event management firm in Denver.

As the executive director, Harris will report directly to the Five Points Business Improvement District Board of Directors. He is set to assume his duties in the second week of January 2024.

Collaborating with the BID Board of Directors, Harris has laid out several goals for the first quarter of 2024, including:

- Active business engagement based on a plan and metrics developed in collaboration with the board chair and shared with the board.

- Activating committees by: engaging committee chairs within two weeks of starting; establishing a monthly meeting schedule and announcing it by the end of January; holding the first meeting for each committee by the end of February; and continuing outreach to recruit committee volunteers.

- Developing an initial fundraising strategy to support the BID’s place making, security and economic development goals beyond its current capacity.

- Providing monthly reports to the board on the accomplishments of set metrics.

The Five Points BID focuses on strengthening and enhancing the efforts of business and property owners who reside, work in or contribute to the historic Five Points neighborhood of Denver. Positioned along Welton Street on the northeast edge of Downtown Denver, the Five Points BID spans a ten-block corridor. The district’s cultural promotion and preservation efforts aim to market the area as a cultural and tourism destination for arts, culture, and entertainment, showcasing Denver’s Black history and rich jazz heritage. ■

Editor’s note: For more information visit: www.fivepointsbid.com

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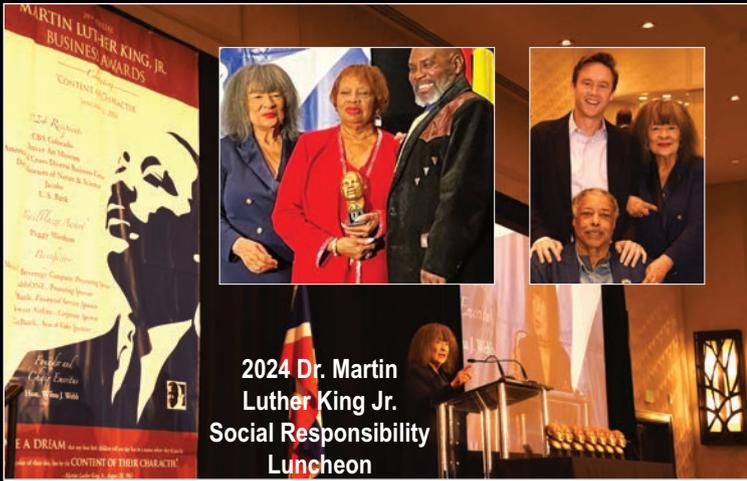
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MLK Jr. AA Rodes of Champions

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REST IN PEACE, POWER AND PARADISE...

Remembering Russell "Doc" Simpson



On Jan. 14, 2024, at the age of 79, Dr. Russell William Simpson, known by many as "Doc" Simpson, concluded a 13-year battle with dementia and Alzheimer's.

Simpson was an internal medicine physician for more than 35 years, and had a successful practice that served the Montbello community for more than 30 years. He was involved in volunteer work with the Colorado Golden Gloves and numerous auto racing events. His selfless commitment to these organizations showcased his dedication to supporting and uplifting others. Whether mentoring aspiring athletes and medical students or actively participating in the community, he genuinely cared for those he served.

Simpson was born in Bridgeville, PA on June 7, 1944, to Russell and Rosa Simpson. He is survived by his loving wife of 41 years, Kathy; children: Luv Dobbins (Robert), Joy Simpson, Scott Simpson (Tess), Jeffrey Simpson, and Kameron Simpson (Jessica); and six grandchildren: Christopher (CJ), Nicolas, Melina, Mia, Leo and Kara. He was preceded in death by his parents and son, Baby Rose.

Simpson donated his body to the University of Colorado Medical Center, the same institution where he pursued his medical education. A Celebration of Life will be held in June 2024.

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“The Spirituals According to Jazz” Celebrates Black History Month

Dazzle Jazz presents “The Spirituals According to Jazz,” a show that delivers jazz-based interpretations of the sacred Negro spirituals. Conceived by local jazz vocalist Wil Alston, the show is dedicated to exposing new listeners to these powerful songs and ensuring they remain relevant in today’s musical landscape.

For enslaved Black Americans, the spirituals served to express faith, hope, and resistance to slavery. Today, these sacred songs serve as foundational elements to modern African American culture.

Performed by Wil Alston and Kool Grooves, the show will be held on Friday, Feb. 9 from 6:30 to 9 p.m. at Dazzle Jazz, located at 1080 14th St. in Denver.

For more information and tickets, visit www.dazzledenver.com or www.koolgrooves.com.

Jazz Roots 2024 Celebrates Black History in Five Points

The Five Points Business Improvement District announced the second annual Jazz Roots event series will be held on Saturday, Feb. 17 and Saturday, Feb. 24, as part of the neighborhood’s celebration of Black History Month. This free

event invites local residents and jazz enthusiasts to experience the rich history of jazz through live performances, spoken word poetry, dance and more.

The Five Points neighborhood, once known as the “Harlem of the West,” holds a significant place in jazz history. From the 1930s to the 1950s, renowned jazz musicians performed in local clubs and bars - many of which still stand today. Jazz Roots aims to honor this vibrant history and celebrate the enduring influence of Black culture on American history at large.

Highlighting the classic jazz music from the American Song Book, attendees can expect

extraordinary performances replicating tunes once performed by legends such as Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, Cab Calloway and Ella Fitzgerald. Jazz Roots 2024 will feature a diverse lineup of musicians, poets and dancers including the Queen City Jazz Band, the Gabe Mervine Jazz Trio, Taryn Newborn and many others.

Jazz Roots is a community-driven event that aims to bring people together to celebrate the beauty and significance of jazz music.

For more information about the Five Points Business Improvement District, visit: www.fivepointsbid.com.

Women Who Charge Host “Sisters in Energy” Awards Dinner

Women Who Charge, a non-profit organization dedicated to advocating and supporting global sustainability efforts, will host the “Sisters in Energy” Awards Dinner on Feb. 28 at the Denver Clock Tower in Downtown Denver. The dinner will recognize and honor six women who have made significant contributions to various sectors within the energy industry.

Those categories include solar clean energy, workforce development, electric transportation, green energy policy, waste reduction, recycling and building electrification.

The event will bring together industry leaders, professionals and supporters from various sectors of the energy industry. Attendees will have the opportunity to network, engage in discussions and celebrate the exceptional achievements of the honorees.

For more information about the event, email LaSheita Sayer at womenwhocharge@gmail.com or 720-949-2020.

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Doris Mae Rorex

After graduating high school, Rorex attended Colorado State University Pueblo. She married the late Jerry Leroy Rorex in 1965, and together they had six children: Sheila, Cherry, Lori, Jerry (J.J.), Adriane and Letitia. She loved her family, and spoke to at least one of her children, descendants or family members each and every day. Her favorite greeting was, "Hello blessed and highly favored!"

Rorex's nursing career spanned 30 years. She worked at the Colorado State Hospital, Parkview Hospital, St. Mary-Corwin Hospital and Fitzsimons Hospital. Like her mother, she had a "caregiving" spirit. She nursed thousands of people back to health, and found joy in putting smiles on their faces. A quote she lived and worked by was, "Smile, it is the key that fits the lock of everybody's heart."

She was an active member of Colorado Community Church in Aurora, and was dedicated to serving the Lord with her whole heart. The church was special to Rorex, who built friendships and attended knitting classes and yoga offered by the place of worship.

Her hobbies included building and maintaining relationships, cooking, baking, watching Jeopardy, walking and taking care of her great-grandchildren, Javelle and Jabari. She sent daily prayers and devotional text messages and frequently traveled to her grandson's basketball games. She loved owls which symbolized inner wisdom, intuitive development and good luck.

One of her favorite pastimes was visiting her sister, Annie. On Oct. 19, she visited for the last time, combing her sister's hair and eating their favorite Popeyes Chicken. At the end of the visit, Rorex turned to her daughter, Sheila, saying "Now my work is done."

When her baby sister and beautiful mother were at the end of their lives, Rorex rubbed their legs and feet to make sure they were comfortable. Similarly, when she was sick, her own children gave her comforting leg and foot rubs. Her generous spirit, beautiful smile and loving personality were adored by many. Her influence will forever remain in the lives of all who knew her.

Rorex was preceded in death by her mother and father, her brothers Darryl and Sylvester Jr., her sister Betty and her nephew Darryl.

Her life will forever be cherished by her children, her sisters Lottie and Annie, her brother Ansley, her grandchildren: Shaunte, Dereck, Dominique, Briana and Shamaya, seven great-grandchildren and a host of nieces and nephews.

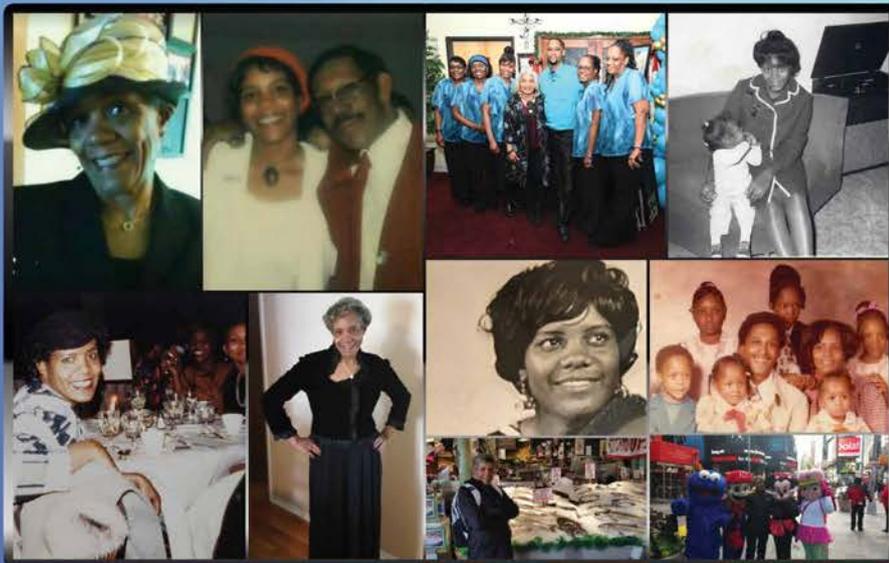
Message from her children: "Mom, your entire family will miss your voice, tender love and care, baking and cooking for holidays and birthdays, and making homemade chicken vegetable soup for all who were sick. MOM, YOU WERE TRULY ONE OF A KIND."

Doris Mae Rorex is safely home; may she rest in God's glory.

Doris Mae Rorex, age 78, was a mother, a retired licensed practical nurse (LPN) and a lover of the Lord. The 38-year resident of Pueblo, Colorado, passed away peacefully on Sunday, Dec. 17, 2023, surrounded by her family at her Denver home.

Born in Montgomery, Alabama, on March 23, 1945, Rorex was the third oldest child of seven. Her parents, Sylvester Sr. and Janie Owens provided a close-knit family environment, and the Rorex siblings were raised to love the Lord. In the late 1940s, her father took a job at a Pueblo steel mill, moving the family west.

Rorex attended public school where she ran track and played on the women's basketball team, and graduated from Pueblo Central High School in 1963. The family worshiped at Beulah Baptist Church and Pueblo's New Bethany Baptist Church, and were encouraged to work hard, prioritize education, give back to the community and live with integrity.



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- Diagnosed with polycythemia vera.
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**More details about the study will be provided by the study team.*





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