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Help! Loan
Debt!

STUDENT DEBT

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Here are a few of the stories we've published exclusively online. Go check them out online or sign up for our one of our newsletters so you don't miss any of our great news.

Retired Wichita Businessman is Building a New Financing Model for Affordable Housing

3 Former Memphis Officers Acquitted In Fatal Beating of Tyre Nichols

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Civil Rights Act of 1964 Goes On Trial May 12

By Southern Education Foundation

Attorneys for the Southern Education Foundation (SEF) will be in federal court Monday, May 12 to begin their defense of a portion of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which the current American administration is attempting to illegally cast aside by tying with inclusion, equity and diversity or IED issues. The simple message from the Southern Education Foundation: IED and civil rights are two very different things.

At issue is the Department of Education's misguided attempt to close the Equity Assistance Center-South, or EAC-South, which is operated by the SEF. This center, more accurately portrayed by its original name, Desegregation Assistance Centers, is not an IED program. It is a facility mandated by Congress in the 1964 Civil Rights Act to assist school districts in dismantling an infrastructure of segregation built to continue the oppression of Black people after slavery ended.

"In today's political

climate, the lines between civil rights enforcement and IED have been recklessly blurred," SEF President Raymond Pierce said. "We now see attacks on constitutionally mandated civil rights programs under the false banner of fighting 'wokeness.' That is legally flawed and morally wrong."

SEF attorneys will make this argument, that executive orders and policy changes cannot override laws passed by the United States Congress, on Monday in the United States District Court for the District of Columbia. These

arguments will take place just five days before the 70th anniversary of the Brown v. Board of Education decision that eventually led to the Civil Rights Movement.

"The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s that birthed the 1964 Civil Rights Act was not a DEI movement," Let's be clear — laws upholding racial segregation were for the purpose of continuing the oppression of Black people despite the end of slavery. It is factual ignorance and a gross insensitivity to blend the 1964 Civil Rights Act with DEI."

BEHIND THE CARTOON

By Clay Jones

I feel I need to remind everyone that having a grifter president (sic) is not normal and is an international embarrassment, which Trump excels. But just in case the grifting wasn't enough of an embarrassment, Trump doubled and tripled down.

The dress code for Pope Francis' funeral was black... all black. Melania followed the code. Naturally, Trump did not. Trump, who was placed in the front row to embarrass us further, wore blue, but at least the \$97 Trump suit was dark blue. Trump talked about his Catholic voters before the trip, but wearing blue at the Pope's funeral only showed them disrespect.

As involved as Trump was with the Italian mobs in New York, and with the amount

of admiration he has for them, he should know they wear black at funerals. C'mon, man. This is almost as bad as him as that time he took Sarah Palin to a chain restaurant for New York pizza, which he ate with a knife and fork.

Trump expressed disrespect in other ways during the funeral. The carpet underneath the Pope's coffin is considered Holy Ground and not to be walked on. Guess who stepped on it. I'll give you a hint: He was wearing a blue suit.

Trump was also caught texting on his phone, chewing gum, and falling asleep during the funeral, all while sitting in the front row. There were over 50 world leaders at the funeral, but Trump was probably the only one sleeping, chewing gum, and probably farting.

CLAYTOONZ: Preaching, Praying, Grifting



Acting like someone trying to beat traffic at a baseball game, Trump left in the ninth inning and left the funeral early. Where did Trump have to be? Upon arrival back in the United States, Trump was on his New Jersey golf course. He was overheard saying, "This

one's for you, Pope," as he kicked his ball out of the rough (I made that one up).

By the way, Trump's "God Bless the USA" Bibles are made in China. I guess God didn't bless the USA enough for Trump to give an American company the business to print his Bibles.

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What We Think You Should Know About Student Debt Repayment

We spend days scouring the internet to find the most important information we think you should know about what's going on with student debt right now.

By Voice Research Team

The federal student loan system is a mess right now.

There's a lot going on with student debt in the midst of a U.S. Dept. of Education that's being phased out and student loan administration reportedly being moved to the Small Business Administration, which has announced it's about to cut its staff by 40%.

"Unprecedented uncertainty," says Beth Akers, a higher education researcher at the conservative-leaning American Enterprise Institute (AEI).

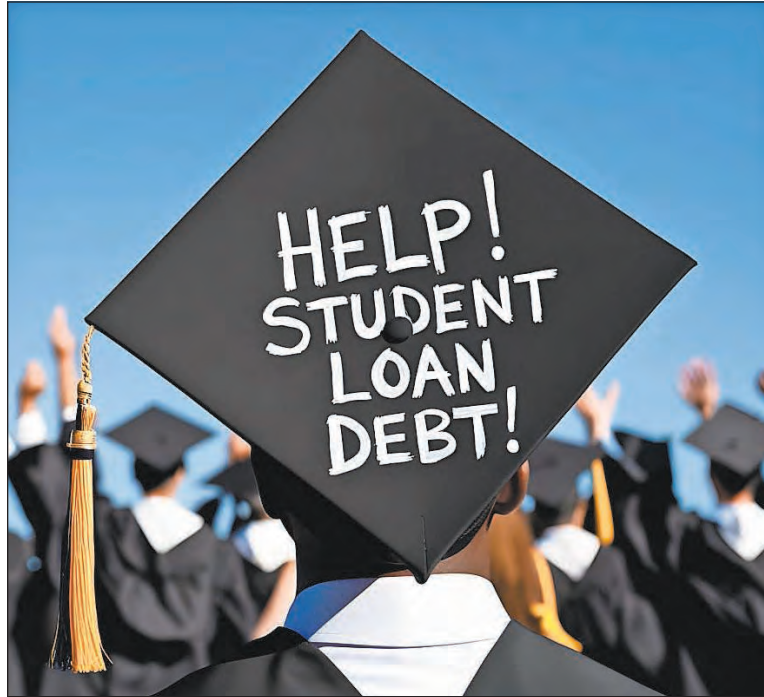
"Total disarray," says Michele Zampini with the left-leaning Institute for College Access and Success.

However, after scouring the internet for information, here are the most important things we found that we think you should know on one page.

Student Loan Collection Was Inevitable.

When the U.S. Dept. of Education paused federal student loan payments at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, it paused the threat of default too. And the era of leniency that followed lasted so long — nearly the entire Biden Administration — that many borrowers are now being caught off-guard by the loan system's slow return to business-as-usual.

On Oct. 1, 2024, the clock resumed and delinquency days started accumulating again. So, you can count from that date to determine



how many days you might be behind.

Delinquency VS Default

When a borrower goes more than 90 days without a payment, a cascade of consequences kicks in, beginning with reporting that delinquency to the national credit bureaus. Weakened credit can make it harder to do all sorts of things, including buying a car or renting a place to live.

It gets worse. After 270 days without making a payment, a borrower is considered in default, which means wages and tax refunds can be seized by the U.S. government.

According to a National Public Radio report, as of March 7, 4.2 million borrowers were more than 90 days late on their payments. And nearly 5 million borrowers were between one and 90 days late.

Notifications

Scott Buchanan, who is the executive director of the Student Loan Servicing Alliance, which represents the companies that

manage student loans for the federal government, says the law requires servicers to warn borrowers — repeatedly — before they plunge into default.

He has a simple message: Do not ignore these warnings.

If your phone rings and the Caller ID says it's your loan servicer, Buchanan says, "We're not trying to upsell you on anything. We have no product to offer. When you see us calling, it's probably because there's a problem. You need to answer."

How Can You Tell If You're Impacted?

The Dept. of Education says it will reach out to all borrowers in default before May 5, through emails and social media posts, "reminding them of their obligations and providing resources and support to assist them in selecting the best repayment plan."

People can also check their status by logging into StudentAid.gov, the Dept. of Education's website.

The online dashboard shows how much debt they owe and to

whom, their monthly payment amount and — if they're in default — a warning message that says so. It's also where they can make sure their email and physical addresses are up-to-date.

What Are Your Options if You're in Default?

There are three primary ways people can get out of default. The quickest, but hardest, is to repay the loans in full.

"If people could pay the loan in full, they probably wouldn't be in default," Mayotte says. "So that's not really an option for most borrowers in this situation."

The two other methods are loan consolidation and rehabilitation.

Loan consolidation is the faster of the two, says Mayotte. It involves paying off your defaulted loans with new repayment terms. While it does not remove the fact that you were once in default from your credit report, it does make you eligible for lower payment options.

For loan rehabilitation, a borrower must make multiple — typically nine — consecutive on-time payments of an amount that is usually based on their income. Once those are paid, the loan is taken out of default and the default line is removed from the person's credit report.

Don't Depend on the SAVE Plan to Save You

Former President Joe Biden's Saving on a Valuable Education (SAVE) repayment plan was so generous with its payment terms and promise of forgiveness that federal courts are currently debating whether it's legal. Before the courts put SAVE on hold, 8 million people had enrolled.

Now, these SAVE borrowers who are in legal limbo don't have to make monthly payments. But if you're a borrower hoping for someone to save SAVE, it might be wise to start exploring other options.

Even if the courts uphold the

plan, Congress seems likely to override SAVE.

Consider Income-Driven Repayment Plans

The judge's order freezing the SAVE plan has raised legal questions about the department's other income-driven repayment plans: Pay As You Earn (PAYE) and Income-Contingent Repayment (ICR).

The online form to enroll in these plans was removed from the Education Department's website more than a month ago, but it's reportedly back up. The department was reportedly looking at them to see if they conformed with a court ruling in the SAVE Plan case.

It was the Biden Administration — not the Trump Administration — that took the form down for review.

Public Service Loan Forgiveness Remains Unchanged

The Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program (PSLF), which promises student loan forgiveness for any borrower who works 10 years in public service, was created by an act of Congress and only an act of Congress can shut it down.

The Trump Administration recently issued an executive action calling for restrictions on who qualifies for PSLF. The plan is to exclude borrowers who work for organizations "that engage in activities that have a substantial illegal purpose," including a broad sweeping list of employer and job types.

These changes cannot be implemented immediately, though, and will need to go through a rulemaking process.

In the meantime, the Federal Student Aid website makes clear, "There are no changes to PSLF currently, and borrowers do not need to take any action."

Borrowers in the SAVE legal limbo should know that the months they're spending in an administrative forbearance, not making payments, will not count toward PSLF.

'The Parker' Breaks Ground at Historic 18th & Vine, Adding to District's Revival

Development brings mixed-income housing and retail to legendary Kansas City jazz corner

By Thomas White
Kansas City Reporter

City leaders and developers broke ground May 5 on The Parker, a \$24 million development on the southwest corner of 18th & Vine, named after jazz legend Charlie Parker.

The project continues the historic jazz district's transformation by renovating the street-level House of Hits building and adding two mixed-use structures with 10,000 sq. ft. of commercial

space and 48 mixed-income residential units in multi-floor buildings.

The project is a partnership between developers McCormack Baron Salazar (MBS), a prominent national developer specializing in urban revitalization and affordable housing, and local development company 18th & Vine Developers LLC.

A public-private partnership with KCMO government selling the property to the developers for \$1. In addition, Central City Economic Development (CCED) sales tax provided \$4 million in critical funding to jump-start the project.

McCormack Baron Salazar returns to the district after previously developing

apartments nearby. The 18th & Vine Developers group includes: Avernir Group LLC; Leonard Graham, president of Taliaferro & Browne; and Kelvin Simmons, chairman of Vine Street Community Improvement District.

"The redevelopment will have mixed-income housing and retail, which will be part of our commitment to not only provide opportunities for housing but also provide economic development opportunities for aspiring emerging entrepreneurs," said Vincent Bennett, CEO of McCormack Baron Salazar.

The site holds deep significance in KC's Black history. From 1890 through the 1940s, 18th & Vine served as the center of African-American culture, commerce, and entertainment. Jazz pioneers like Charlie Parker and Count Basie performed in clubs that lined the streets, creating what became known as the Kansas City jazz sound.

At the groundbreaking, Graham shared his personal connection to the district.

"My father, who was a young man in Kansas City in the late '30s and '40s, told me stories about catching a Charlie Parker set and then



Developers and officials break ground on "The Parker."

walking around the corner to hear the Count Basie band," Graham said.

The district has seen various revitalization attempts since the early 1990s, beginning with the "Clever Plan" led by then-Councilman Emanuel Cleaver. The American Jazz Museum and Negro Leagues Baseball Museum opened in 1997, anchoring the district's cultural significance.

The Parker represents part of what Simmons described as approximately \$400 million in new investment along the 18th Street corridor from



Street view renderings of the development

Lydia to Brooklyn avenues.

"Things are going to get messier for the next couple of years," Graham said,

referencing upcoming work on the 18th Street pedestrian mall, Boone Theater renovations, and the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum expansion. "But construction disruption, dust and orange barrels is the price of progress that we pay for the creation of a new 18th and Vine historic district."

"We will have an 18th and Vine where we don't just tell stories, but where we make new ones," said Mayor Quinton Lucas during the ceremony. "And we will have an 18th and Vine that continues to be a crown jewel – not just of our Black community – but of our entire region."

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Development Delays, Restart and Stop in Wyandotte County

By Bonita Gooch
The Voice Editor-in-Chief

Wyandotte County is in the midst of a development boom, but a couple of anticipated projects are delayed, a delayed project is restarting, and a couple of anticipated projects have become a firm no-go.

KCKCC Downtown Campus

The construction of the new Kansas City Kansas Community College campus in downtown KCK is being delayed due to required remediation concerns on the site.

Construction crews broke ground in fall 2023 on the 100,000-sq.-ft. education and wellness center at the corner of Seventh Street and State Avenue. In addition to the community college, the building was a partnership with Swope Health and



The Rock Island Bridge redevelopment project is one of a number of highly anticipated projects in Wyandotte County that have been either delayed, restarted or stopped.

Community America Credit Union.

“We had some delays with some of the items we found underground that needed remediation,” KCKCC President Greg Mosier said. “It set us back just about a full year.”

The \$75 million project now is on track to be

substantially complete by May 2026, and KCKCC would begin welcoming students to the campus for the fall 2026 semester.

Rock Island Bridge

Also delayed, again, is the opening of the redeveloped Rock Island Bridge, a project

that will change an abandoned bridge over the Kansas River into the country’s first “destination” bridge.

The Rock Island Bridge was originally set to open in spring 2023, but again this year the project has been delayed, with a tentative opening in September or October.

Wyandotte County has invested in the bridge, which is being developed by a nonprofit organization. The U.G. is chipping in \$2 million for the estimated \$15 million project and will be reimbursed for its contribution through a 22-year Community Improvement District with a 2% sales tax.

American Royal Moving Ahead Again

The State of Kansas and the Unified Government have come through for the

American Royal after a lack of funds brought the project to a standstill in February.

Last month the state and the county approved a revised development agreement and sales tax revenue (STAR) bond that grants the nonprofit \$155 million to cover roughly 42% of the total project cost.

The food and agriculture nonprofit broke ground on the project in western Wyandotte County in 2023 after first announcing its move from Missouri to Kansas in 2016.

With the new financing, the American Royal can resume construction on its \$375 million campus that includes a large barn and roughly 400,000-square-foot exhibition space, three arenas (two indoor arenas, and an outdoor arena), and an education and welcome center that will focus on food and

agricultural education.

Total Stop

In case you missed it, the Lanier Development project in downtown KC that was planned on the site of the shuttered Reardon Convention Center is a firm no-go after developer Willie Lanier Jr. failed to start construction on the site by the required start date under his latest development agreement.

The Minnesota Avenue Triangle Project announced last year is also a no-go. Developer Flaherty & Collins pulled out of the \$145 million+ two-phase project at Fourth St. and Minnesota Ave. citing a gap in funding needed for the project.

Read more about what’s coming in development in KCK in our article “Wyandotte Wins - Development Boom” at <https://bit.ly/4iR4PqI>



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More Jackson County Seniors Now Eligible for Property Tax Freeze, Deadline Extended

As tax battles rage, more than 40,000 seniors already benefit from Jackson County’s expanded property tax relief program.

By Thomas White
Kansas City Reporter

While Jackson County property owners continue to battle over tax assessment increases and potential rollbacks, seniors just got a lifeline.

County Executive Frank White signed an ordinance extending the application deadline for the Senior Property Tax Credit Program to June 30 and removing key eligibility restrictions.

The program effectively freezes property tax bills for qualifying seniors, protecting them from future increases that have sparked controversy throughout the county.

More than 40,000 senior homeowners in Jackson County have already been accepted into the program, and the county now provides the longest enrollment window among similar programs throughout Missouri.

“This extension ensures our senior homeowners, who have built and sustained our communities, have the time they need to receive meaningful relief,” White said upon signing the ordinance.

The expanded program eliminates two major

barriers that previously limited participation.

Seniors no longer need to qualify for or provide proof of Social Security retirement benefits. The new age requirement is simply 62 and older, with applicants needing only to provide proof of age using a government-issued document with date of birth.

The county has also removed market value restrictions on eligible properties. Previously, homes valued over \$550,000 were excluded from the program. Previously, the restrictions were intended to benefit only seniors in less costly homes and on social security. The idea was that the county didn’t want to subsidize wealthy elderly homeowners who face far less risk of losing their homes over tax increases.

That cap has now been eliminated entirely, allowing more seniors to qualify regardless of their home’s market value.

“While state law has mandated changes to our program, residents who have already applied for the property tax credit do not need to re-apply,” said Scott Lakin, Jackson County Dept. of Collection director.

Americans Still Don't Know How & When to Wash Their Hands

By The VOICE News Service

For some of us, the hygiene lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic apparently have not sunk in with too many Americans still not doing their due diligence when it comes to washing their hands.

That's according to a new survey released on May 5, World Hand Hygiene Day, that found nearly half of its respondents forget or choose not to wash their hands at key times, such as after visiting grocery stores, restaurants, coffee shops and health care settings including a doctor's office or hospital.

The survey is part of the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases' Hands in for Handwashing Campaign, which raises awareness of the importance of handwashing to help stop the spread of infectious diseases.

Handwashing can make a big difference. "Since about 80% of infectious diseases are spread by dirty hands, routine, proper handwashing throughout the year can significantly help prevent the spread of infectious diseases," according to



The handwashing hygiene lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic apparently did not sink in with many Americans.

the report.

The habit can also prevent 1 in 3 people from getting diarrhea and 1 in 5 people from developing a respiratory illness, Dr. Vincent Hill, adjunct associate professor of environmental health at Emory University's Rollins School of Public Health in Atlanta, told CNN in 2020.

Handwashing and Bathroom Visits

And if you're one of those people who doesn't wash their hands after using the restroom because they "only went pee," Hopkins urged people to remember that in public restrooms especially, there are at least millions

of bacteria on every surface you're touching, from the many people going in and out of that bathroom all day. Even if your urine is sterile, it doesn't mean everything else is.

That might be why the study found men were more likely than women to not wash their hands at important times and to think handwashing requires less time.

Varied Handwashing Habits

Sixty-two percent of participants correctly answered that washing hands with soap and water for 20 seconds is the method that most effectively reduces the spread of germs, while 13% thought less time would be enough and 24% believed more time is needed.

The top three situations that prompted respondents to wash their hands were using the bathroom, handling food and handling human or animal waste.

"This is good news, given that a single gram of human feces can contain 1 trillion germs — including Salmonella, E. coli, and norovirus — that can cause

FACT CHECK:

About 80% of infectious diseases are spread by dirty hands.

NATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR INFECTIOUS DISEASES

disease," the report stated.

But only 30% of participants said they were most likely to wash their hands after sneezing or coughing, "which is concerning given how easily respiratory diseases such as influenza ... can spread," the report added.

Adults older than 60 were most diligent in their handwashing habits, with 74% doing so after using the bathroom or handling food. The greater likelihood in this age group may be due to awareness of the fact that older adults have a higher risk of getting sick, according to the report.

"Older folks, we didn't have hand sanitizers when we were younger," said Dr. Georges Benjamin, executive director of the American Public Health Association, who wasn't involved in the research. "When I went

How to Properly Wash Your Hands

Scrubbing for at least 20 seconds, using proper technique, gets rid of germs that can make you sick. The first step is wetting your hands to help the soap work better.

You should wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and running water. Research shows most people don't wash their hands long enough for handwashing to be fully effective.

That's about enough time to quietly hum the "happy birthday" song twice.

Try humming the birthday song for a while to help develop a habit. The more you time yourself, the more you'll get used to lathering up for 20 seconds. And soon, it'll become a habit.

What are the handwashing steps?

Here are steps you should follow, provided by the Cleveland Clinic.

Wet your hands. Use clean, running water (warm or cold). Then, turn off the faucet to save water.

Apply soap. Lather up and rub your hands together for at least 20 seconds. Don't forget to wash your wrists, the back of each hand, the spaces between your fingers and under your fingernails. This part is so important. The friction of rubbing your hands together helps get your hands clean.

Rinse your hands. Turn the tap back on and rinse your hands under running water. Make sure all the soap is gone. A thorough rinse removes all the germs, chemicals and dirt from your hands.

Turn off the faucet. Use your elbow or a paper towel. This can prevent more germs from latching onto your now-clean hands.

Dry your hands. Use a clean paper towel or hand towel to thoroughly dry your hands. It's tempting to just shake out your hands and let them air dry. But research shows that it's easier for germs to spread on wet hands versus dry ones. So, get your hands nice and dry to help them stay cleaner for longer.

outside to play, when I came back in, I was supposed to wash my hands. So I think that you're looking at behaviors that may have changed from a generation to another generation."

The Use of Sanitizer

Hand sanitizer is great to have when you absolutely can't wash your hands, but you shouldn't depend on it,

given its inability to kill certain bacteria or viruses such as C. diff and norovirus, Hopkins said.

If you're worried about your hands being too dry after washing or sanitizing, you can carry a small bottle of lotion in your bag or car, experts said. Applying lotion when your hands are still slightly damp helps your skin lock in moisture.



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A Black Father's Truth About Raising a Child with Autism

Breaking the silence. Too little is known about autism in the Black community.

By TyJuan Davis
The Voice Wichita
Contributor

This story is part of a series on Autism in the Black community on our website CommunityVoiceKS.com. Find this story on our website to get links to the other stories.

When Darrell Gails began working in Wichita Public Schools more than 20 years ago, he didn't realize that his time spent in special education classrooms was divine preparation for a more personal assignment — his own daughter's autism diagnosis.

"I didn't go looking for those classrooms," he says. "But looking back, I believe God was getting me ready for Carter."

Carter is Gails's third daughter of four. Carter was officially diagnosed with autism after early signs became apparent: delayed speech, minimal eye contact, repetitive behaviors like arm flapping, and not responding to her name until she was nearly 3 years old. She didn't begin speaking until age 4 — but found ways to communicate in the meantime.

"She'd grab my hand and guide me to the fridge when she wanted milk," he says. "That was her way of talking."

Autism in the Black Community

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a developmental condition that affects communication, behavior, and how individuals interact with the world around them. While autism can affect anyone, the journey toward diagnosis and support looks very different for Black families.

Studies have shown that Black children are diagnosed with autism later than White children and are more likely to be misdiagnosed or overlooked altogether.

Some of this delay is due to systemic barriers — limited access to healthcare, fewer culturally competent professionals, and a lack of awareness in underserved communities. Stigma and fear also play a role.

"In our community, there's this hesitation to talk about mental health or developmental issues," Gails said. "We don't always want to believe something might be 'wrong.' But the truth is, early intervention is key."

Even as someone with years of experience working with children with special needs, Gails questioned himself when Carter was diagnosed.

"I remember thinking,

"Did I do something wrong?" he says. "But I know now — it's not something to fix. It's a different way of being."

Strength, Support & Seeing Differently

As Carter grew, her uniqueness became more visible. She taught herself to read — in Russian — by watching YouTube videos. She developed an honest and deeply compassionate heart.

"She's got a superpower," Gails says. "She's smart, she's kind, and she sees the world through her own lens."

The journey isn't without fear — especially the fear many Black parents quietly carry.

"Will she be safe in a world that often misunderstands Black children?" he asks. "Will people mistake her silence or behaviors as defiance? Will they treat her with dignity?"

Those are questions many Black families raising children with autism wrestle with — balancing love and protection with the desire to give their child freedom.

One powerful moment was when Carter began saying "no."

"She used to go along with anything. Now she sets boundaries," Gails says. "That gives her a voice — and safety."



Darrell Gails and his daughters (L-R) Carter, Kaydence and Kynlee, enjoyed an afternoon at the Riverside Park playground in Wichita. Gails' daughter Carter is autistic. He noticed her symptoms early, like one demonstrated in this photo, her desire not to make eye contact.

Faith, Family & Forward Motion

Carter's early diagnosis allowed her to receive services through Rainbows United and speech therapy at the Speech, Swallowing and Voice Center. She entered preschool at age 3 and was placed with peer models, not isolated.

"We didn't want her separated from other kids," Gails says. "We wanted her to grow with them — and they've grown from her too."

Gails credits his faith and family for creating a supportive village.

"God comes first. And my family has embraced her from Day One. She's never

been 'othered' — she's always been ours."

Fatherhood, especially in the context of raising a child with autism, has transformed Gails.

"She's taught me patience. She's taught me to listen. Sometimes kids don't need you to fix it — they need you to understand."

His message to other Black parents is urgent and heartfelt:

"Don't wait. Don't dismiss it. Look up the signs. Ask questions. If it's not autism, fine. But if it is, the earlier you act, the better. And remember — your child isn't broken. They're beautiful. Just like Carter."

6 Big Takeaways on Autism

Autism impacts 1 in 36 children in America

1. Autism isn't a disease. This is important because we try to "cure" diseases. With autism, the goal is to help identify and make the most of their strengths while managing any challenges they might face.

2. Children are born with autism. It's not because of something you did wrong or how they were raised.

3. Autistic people may excel more in certain areas and need more support in other areas.

4. The term "spectrum" in Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) reflects the wide range of characteristics, symptoms, and severity of autism. Some individuals exhibit mild symptoms and others experience more significant challenges.

5. Providers organize autism characteristics into two main categories:

How your child socializes: difficulties with social communication and interaction.
How your child acts: Restricted and repetitive behaviors, interests or activities.

6. The research is clear early: diagnosis leading to early treatment — before age 5 — is imperative for success in treating autism. African-American children typically receive treatment later and are often misdiagnosed.

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Bid Stalls to Rename Troost Ave. to Truth Ave.

Troost Avenue, infamous as KC's racial red line and named after a slaveholder, keeps its name for now.

By **Thomas White**
Kansas City Reporter

For the second time, efforts to rename Kansas City's Troost Avenue failed to advance May 5 when Mayor Quinton Lucas and Councilwoman Andrea Bough voted to place the measure on hold during a council special committee for legal review meeting.

The ordinance, sponsored by District 3 Councilwoman Melissa Robinson, would have changed the name of the historic Kansas City street from Troost Avenue to Truth Avenue, removing the legacy of Dr. Benoist Troost, a 19th-century physician and slaveholder.

"The question is really clear for us: it is a fact that street names honor and celebrate the person whom they are named after," Robinson said. "So our question today is, should we not celebrate a known slave holder in Kansas City by changing the name of the street?"

Historical Context

Troost Avenue is named after Dr. Benoist Troost, Kansas City's first physician, who owned six enslaved people. Beyond its namesake's troubling history, the street became infamous as a racial dividing line in the city, a symbol of segregation that



Melissa Robinson

continues to impact perceptions today.

The street has long carried negative connotations for many Kansas City residents. Business owners along the corridor speak of customers hesitant to visit their establishments because of the street's reputation and historical associations with racial segregation.

Advocates supporting the name change argue that renaming the street would acknowledge past injustices while creating space for healing and unity. Opponents worry about the practical costs for residents and businesses, from changing addresses on identification and banking documents to updating marketing materials and signage.

The \$50,000 allocated in the ordinance would only cover city street signs, leaving individual property owners to bear additional costs of the transition.



Chris Goode

The potential name change to Truth Avenue would only affect Kansas City south of the Missouri River. Troost Avenue in the city's northland would be given additional time to consider a separate name change.

Why Truth Avenue?

Chris Goode, owner of Ruby Jean's Juicery on Troost and the most vocal advocate for the name change, has been engaging with the community on this issue for years. It was Goode who brought forth the name "Truth."

He chose that name for its phonetic similarity to Troost, making the transition more practical, but also for its symbolic significance. The name represents an acknowledgment of historical facts about slavery and segregation while pointing toward reconciliation.

Goode has championed the "Truth Over Troost" campaign

for nearly three years, gathering 12,000+ petition signatures.

Preserving History While Moving Forward

The ordinance included provisions to preserve the history of Troost Avenue through an archival program at the Kansas City Museum, ensuring the street's complex legacy wouldn't be erased but rather contextualized in a more appropriate setting.

"We have been collaborating with the Museum of Kansas City to develop a permanent exhibit that details the history of Troost — the person and the avenue," says Goode.

Community Input

At the special committee meeting, more than a dozen residents voiced their thoughts on the potential name change.

Father Justin Matthews, CEO of Reconciliation Services on Troost Avenue, supported the name change but urged the council to go further.

"Let me be clear, I am not here simply to advocate for this name change, which I do support, but I am here to implore the city council to also fund and undertake simultaneously the work of reconciliation," Matthews said.

Local business owners also

showed support for the initiative. Alan Kneeland, owner of The Combine restaurant located across from Ruby Jean's Juicery, came forward to endorse the change.

Chris Koch, president of the Hyde Park Neighborhood Association, said residents were caught off guard by the proposal.

"We have a lot of residents caught off guard. Multiple emails and Facebook messages were sent to me over the past week regarding a mailer sent, which was the first time Hyde Park Neighborhood Association had heard of this change officially, outside of the news media outlets," Koch said.

Echoes of Past Name Change Battles

The council special committee's hesitation appeared to stem from Kansas City's contentious 2019 experience when it renamed The Paseo to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard without sufficient community engagement. Voters overwhelmingly reversed that decision in a city-wide vote.

After the Paseo name change was overturned, Lucas directed the Parks and Recreation Board to gather public input on how to honor King. This ultimately led to naming a stretch of Swope

Parkway, Volker Boulevard and Blue Parkway for the civil rights leader in 2021.

Councilwoman Bough hinted at her discomfort with moving forward without more consensus.

"I feel a little uncomfortable being at this table," Bough said when discussing the possibility of approving the ordinance without more community engagement.

What Comes Next

Despite the setback, Robinson indicated the fight isn't over.

"The committee voted it off the docket, but that doesn't mean that we can't, as the majority of the council, address this issue," Robinson told reporters after the meeting. "So, now, it really is about taking it to the full floor and working with other council members who would potentially want to see the name change."

Robinson defended the community engagement process, noting the city had conducted unprecedented outreach, including an online survey that showed 70% support for changing the name.

"We've been doing community engagement for more than two years," Robinson said. "I don't think the city has ever done as much community engagement as we've done on this topic ever."

Wichita Announces Details of Restructured Junior League Football and Free Enrollment Promotion

2025 league rules, regulations, season dates and registration instructions are now available along with details on new program structure.

By Bonita Gooch
The Voice Editor-in-Chief

City of Wichita Park and Recreation rolled out details for the second year of their restructured Junior League football program with the announcement of a program that waives registration and uniform costs for the first 400 players to sign up.

There's been considerable resistance to the new program's format, which ends a 60-year-old community-based league, and replaces it with a program in partnership with Wichita Public Schools.

League organizers hope the new program structure and free registration promotion will help attract participants to a program that had been losing participants to other area leagues while maintaining the league's loyal participants who are skeptical of the new structure.

Free Registration & Uniforms

Thanks to Wichita District 1 City Councilman Brandon Johnson, the first 400 Wichita residents who register for the city's 2025 Junior League football program will receive their registration fees (\$55) and uniform fees (\$65) paid for. The lucky 400 will only be required to pay a \$25 non-refundable reservation fee to rent equipment from Play It Again Sports.

To make the promotion possible, Johnson agreed to use \$49,450 from the District 1 Hyatt Fund to cover the cost. In 2017, the city decided each district would get \$1 million of proceeds from the Hyatt sale to fund community

improvement projects.

Johnson, who played Wichita Junior League and high school football, donned his old Heights football jersey for a video promoting the new league and the free registration promotion.

"This league helped shape me and where I'm at today, and now I want to make sure every young athlete has the same opportunity as I did," says Johnson in the video.

Registration kicked off May 7 and runs through July 1. The free registration is on a first-come basis so interested families should act quickly.

The Big Sell

Johnson, who posted the one-minute promo video on his Facebook Page on the day Junior League registration opened, pushed beyond announcing the free promotion. He's clearly making an effort to sell the league to players the league has lost and those they hope to keep.

"Stay with us, play with us, because the future is bright for Wichita Junior Football League," pitches Johnson

Potentially in a nod to the program improvements implemented during Year One of the two-year league transition, Johnson says, "Now is your time to be part of something great, and this year we're stepping it up even more."

D u r i n g
2024, a transitional year in the league's partnership with USD

Some Important Dates & Info Resources

League registration is open May 7 - July 1.

Season (eight games) runs Sept. 6 to Oct. 25.

Physicals must be turned in by Aug. 22 to be eligible to play Week 1.

Register at wichita.gov/football

More info at wichita.gov/football

If you can't find your answers online, call (316) 268-4123.



This year there will be Junior League Football in Wichita, but not Colt, Cowboys, Bulldogs or other popular teams.

259, game play moved to city high school fields. Participants and league officials said that was a significant improvement after three years playing on modified soccer fields in South Wichita, decades of noticeable decline at Barry Sanders Field, and unfulfilled promises for the fields and facilities at Glen Dye (formerly Grove) Park.

Another selling point ... "Seventh and eighth graders will be coached by actual middle school coaches to help make the transition to high school football even smoother," says Johnson.

School Feeder Program Teams

This is part of the league's

major reorganization being ushered in this season. Gone are the old familiar community-based football teams – the Colts, the Cowboys, the Trojans.

Instead, students will be assigned to teams based on the address where they live and the high school students on that street are assigned to attend.

Instead of being Colts, Cowboys or Trojans, the teams feeding up to East High School will be the Junior Aces and similarly for teams feeding up to Heights, the Junior Falcons, etc.

As mentioned earlier, the middle school teams will have a middle school head coach paid for by the school district. All other coaches will remain voluntary. That includes the 1st through 5th grade program, where students will also be assigned to teams based on high school feeder patterns.

Having students assigned to teams based on feeder patterns address another concern, the existence of hand-picked super teams who dominate the league. To assure students play on a team based on their

feeder pattern and age, USD 259 will provide the league Pupil Identification Cards for all participants.

The community-based league structure, which dates back to the 1960s, was founded by Pappy Allen in Northeast Wichita. When the program became a part of Wichita Recreation, involvement grew beyond Northeast Wichita, but community loyalty and support of the program remained among the strongest in the league.

Losing this foundational program has been tough for those closely connected to it, but Wichita Park and Recreation officials say they hear from a lot of people who welcome the change.

Diminishing League Participation

Mickey Lara, recreation supervisor with the Wichita Park and Recreation Dept., who oversees the Wichita Junior League Program, says this major reorganization of

See **Football** Page 15 →



Wichita City Councilman Brandon Johnson donned his high school football jersey for a video promoting the launch of the reorganized Wichita Junior League Football Program and a free first-come, first-served registration and uniform promotion.

Aujanæ Bennett Enters Race for Wichita District 1 Council Seat

By Bonita Gooch

The Voice Editor-in-Chief

Community activist Aujanæ Bennett has filed to run for the District 1 seat on the Wichita City Council. The seat, which represents central northeast Wichita, is currently held by Councilman Brandon Johnson, who can not seek reelection due to term limits.

Bennett is the third candidate to enter the race. Previously announced candidates are Joseph Shepard and LaWanda DeShazer.

Bennett, who has served as president of the Northeast Millair Neighborhood Association for eight years, came to the greater community's attention three years ago when she sounded the alarm about the toxic spill that had contaminated much of the groundwater in her

neighborhood.

"If I hadn't been at that meeting as a president of an association, we still wouldn't know," said Bennett about the spill the Kansas Dept. of Health and Environment knew about in 1994, but failed to engage the community around.

Bennett didn't just hear the information, she acted on it. She's spent the past three years actively fighting to bring attention to the spill, get it cleaned up and to get those impacted by the spill tested for related cancers.

It's a role that's landed her on a number of related boards and commissions, including one appointed by Gov. Laura Kelly.

"I need to be there, because when we're not there, we get left out," said Bennett

Through roles like this, she says she feels God pushing her

Aujanæ Bennett



to serve. That's why she decided to run.

Her platform includes improving the quality of life for people in the community. She wants to see transparency in the community and sustainable situations and solutions for mental health and affordable housing.

Bennett, 61, is a Wichita native. She owns and operates an insurance brokerage company and previously owned and operated a daycare for 12 years.

If a fourth candidate enters the race, there will be a primary on Aug. 4. The general election is Nov. 4.

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TKAAM Announces Shane Carter as New Executive Director

By Bonita Gooch
The Voice Editor-in-Chief

The board of directors of The Kansas African American Museum (TKAAM) have announced Shane Carter as the organization's new executive director. Carter will begin his role this month.

Carter comes to the position from the Lincoln Community Center in Troy, Ohio, where he served as executive director. The historic center has served Troy's Black community first as a school in the 1860s and then as a community center since 1916.

Carter, who worked at the center for 13 years, helped expand the center's programming, helped lead a \$5.5 million capital campaign and helped oversee the construction of

a 21,803-sq.-ft. expansion to the center.

In addition, he helped expand the center's programming to include nearly 60 programs and 10 major annual collaborative events including a Thanksgiving feast, Easter egg hunt, and back-to-school bash. The center also offers a youth summer camp that this year will offer a unique weekly-themed camp over seven weeks.

Carter also operated his own contracting and construction management company that completed residential and commercial construction and remodeling.

All of these skills make Carter an excellent fit for The Kansas African American Museum, which is about to undergo the transformation of its future new home from a bank to a state-of-the-art museum and community center

that offers an expanding list of outreach programs to the community and the region.

"I am thrilled to join TKAAM at such a pivotal moment in its history," said Carter. "The new museum and cultural center in downtown Wichita will not only transform TKAAM into a central hub for cultural tourism but will also expand the museum's reach, engaging visitors and communities both locally and online."

Edward Watson, the TKAAM board chair, was impressed by Carter's "knowledge, enthusiasm and experience with programming for diverse age groups, fundraising, and community engagement. We are fortunate to have him."

Carter's passion for TKAAM's mission resonates with the Board's vision. "I'm inspired by the board's bold plans for the new facility, and I am excited to be part of an orga-

nization that is about to grow its offering to Kansas as an invaluable educational resource," he added. "The opportunity to elevate the museum's reach and deepen its impact is an endeavor I wanted to be part of."

Carter replaces Denise Sherman, who served as TKAAM executive director for six years. She resigned in January for a position in higher education.

In 2023, under Sherman's leadership, the museum announced plans to relocate from their existing facility in the historic Calvary Baptist Church to the former Sunflower Bank Building at 201 N. Main, in downtown Wichita.



Shane Carter

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- After August 15: \$470 - \$570 (includes Pre-Conference)
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Meet Shalese Clay: New Uzazi Village CEO

From pharmacy technician to CEO: Shalese Clay charts a new course for Uzazi Village.

By **Thomas White**
Kansas City Reporter

Shalese Clay didn't set out to become a leader in maternal health. The Kansas City native was working as a pharmacy technician when a community health worker class introduced her to a world that would change her life.

That path led her to Uzazi Village and its co-founder, Hakima Payne. The organization, whose name means "birth" in Swahili, opened Clay's eyes to her own maternal health trauma.

"I was 24 when I had my daughter. I had preeclampsia and got extremely sick in the hospital," Clay says. Her daughter was rushed to the NICU, a fact Clay didn't learn until much later.

Despite having a Black physician, Clay felt excluded from her care decisions. This experience mirrors the problems Uzazi Village was created to address when Payne and three co-founders established it in 2012 – providing free culturally appropriate perinatal care services to Black and Brown families, and creating what Clay describes as "a safe place" for expectant mothers.

Now, after serving as board chair, Clay officially stepped into the CEO role in November 2024, taking over from Payne, who departed to pursue other interests including completing her dissertation, traveling and taking a well-deserved break.

"Mama Hakima," as she was often fondly called, was a fixture in the community and a visionary leader in Black Maternal Health, not just in Kansas City, but across the nation. She will be missed and leaves giant shoes for Clay to fill.



Shalese Clay, new CEO of Uzazi Village, brings years of maternal health advocacy experience to her leadership role after taking the helm in November 2024.

Clay Steps Up

Before Uzazi, Clay worked at Samuel Rogers Center, Cradle KC, and founded her own nonprofit – Elevating My Community – with initiatives including Black Dads KC and Queens Village, focused on Black maternal health. This background in community organizing informs her leadership approach.

"As a leader, I want to bring up other people behind me that can take the organization even higher than I can," says Clay. "I don't want to be a dictator. I want to be a manager who will give you the things you need so that you can go and be successful."

Clay brings her own leadership style to an organization that has become central to Black maternal health in Kansas City over the past decade.

"Hakima always kinda kept the lid on the jar," Clay explains. "For me, I'm the opposite. People don't know about the work that Uzazi has done over the past 12 years: I want

to change that and take it to the next level."

This higher visibility approach marks one of several shifts Clay plans to implement while preserving the organization's core mission. Since its founding, Uzazi Village has provided free culturally appropriate perinatal care services to Black and Brown families.

Perinatal services cover the period encompassing pregnancy, labor, delivery, and the first few weeks or months after birth. It's a critical time for both the mother and the baby, and can encompass a wide range of health and developmental considerations.

The organization currently offers doula training and support, midwifery services, lactation consulting, a clothing boutique for mothers and their children, diaper distribution, and breastfeeding support groups – all at no cost to families regardless of income.

Unlike traditional healthcare settings where



After 12-years of leading and growing Uzazi Village, co-founder and long-term CEO Hakima Payne left the organization with goals of completing her dissertation and traveling.

appointments might last 10-15 minutes, Uzazi offers sessions where clients receive comprehensive education and resources.

"Uzazi Village is uniquely designed to make sure we are loving on you and protecting you and making sure that you know that you have people behind you," Clay says.

Looking Ahead

For Clay, whose maternal health work began with her own difficult birth experience, leading Uzazi Village represents an opportunity to create what she calls "a Black ecosystem" – healthcare designed for and utilized by the community.

Her three-year plan includes expanding doula education, particularly for the Spanish-speaking community, and broadening clinical services through a low-cost subscription model.

"We want to expand on women's health in the community," Clay says. "Why not be able to do a smaller scale [medical clinic] within this community, where people feel comfortable and know us the most?"

She envisions offering well-women exams, STI

testing, and lab work at affordable rates. This would create revenue streams for Uzazi Village that don't rely on increasingly uncertain government funding or philanthropy.

Clay's long-term vision extends beyond maternal care to include paternal health.

"We need our fathers here," Clay says, suggesting blood pressure checks and other services for men who accompany mothers to appointments.

By Year Three of her leadership, Clay hopes to establish satellite locations and eventually add a pharmacy.

"I would love to be able to put things back in our community that have been stripped from us," says Clay.

Her ultimate goal remains eliminating the stark disparities that make Black women three times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes and Black infants die at more than twice the rate of White babies.

Funding & Donations

Like many Black-focused nonprofits, Uzazi is concerned about the future of their funding.

"We have had some funders and foundations, who have

recently said, 'Hey, we are not going to be able to fund anymore,'" says Clay.

The organization has (remarkably) operated for 12 years without federal dollars, despite doula care now being covered by Medicaid. "In 12 years, [we have] never had a federal dollar," says Clay. "Which speaks volumes about our partners, our funders, who know that we are out here doing the work."

But sustainability concerns drive her vision for the future. "If we rely on trying to get Medicaid reimbursements, we might have to shut our doors down, and that's not okay with me," says Clay. "So we have to figure out a way that works for us and the community." While she explores additional funding sources like adding more low-cost wrap-around health services or even a subscription-care model, Clay is proud of the work being done at Uzazi Village and encourages the community to stop by. "Come see why you should donate," she says, "and I will show you why and where your dollars are going to – because it directly goes to our family, so they can get these services for free."

About Uzazi Village

Uzazi Village supports Black and Brown families with free-to-low-cost services focused on pregnancy, childbirth, and early parenting. Its Ida Mae Patterson Center offers group prenatal care through the "Village Circle Approach," where small cohorts of pregnant people receive checkups, education, and support in a culturally centered setting. Uzazi also provides lactation help, free breastfeeding clinics, and a parent-led playgroup.

Families can pick up free diapers through the Diaper Depot, run in partnership with Happy Bottoms. Their boutique offers free maternity and children's clothes (up to size 6). While doula support is part of their model, training to become a doula costs \$1,500, but scholarships are available. The organization also hosts Chocolate Milk Café, a support group for Black breastfeeding parents.

WICHITA

Tue., May 13, 9:30 - 11 am: Storytime in the Park, Naftzger Park, 601 E Douglas. Read along with stories on the big screen at Naftzger Park and enjoy music, snacks, free books and an activity for the kids. Storytime in the Park is a partnership between Storytime Village and Wichita Park & Recreation. **FREE**

Tue., May 13 through Thu., May 15, 6 pm: Veterans Claims Signup, IAMAW Lodge 70, 3830 S. Meridian. IAM Veteran Coordinators will be at District 70 & Local 839 to assist in filing claims. Schedule a time with Teresa or Tammy at 316-522-1591.

Fri., May 16, 7 - 8:30 pm: Teen Heroes Awards, Wichita State University CAC Theater. Get ready to celebrate the amazing teens in our community at the Teen

Hero Awards. The Teen Hero Awards will honor young individuals who have shown exceptional courage, leadership, and kindness. Get ready to be inspired by their incredible stories and achievements. COST \$10 <https://bit.ly/3Yz7sq6>

Sat., May 17, 8:01 am: Family Gardening Saturday, Safe Streets Wichita, 1200 E. Waterman. Learn about the ICT Treehuggers and get involved in Community Gardening. Come at 8 am for our coffee social before going out into the community to garden. **FREE**

Sat., May 17, 1 pm: Family Search Unlocking its Full Potential, Wichita Public Library, 711 W. 2nd St. A hands-on workshop designed to help you confidently navigate and make the most of FamilySearch.org. In this class:

Explore the various websites owned and maintained by FamilySearch, as well as how to use FamilySearch Labs to access experimental and advanced features. **FREE**

Sun., May 18, 7:30 pm: Midwest R&B Fest, Wave, 650 E. 2nd St. Featuring Vedo, Keke Wyatt, Frankie J & Jon B & Friends. COST \$37.50+ <https://bit.ly/4d4bpJm>

TOPEKA

Fri., May 16, 7 pm: Michael Jackson Tribute Concert, Topeka, The Beacon, 420 SW 9th St. Starring America's #1 MJ impersonator Danny Dash Andrews. Be a part of this incredible concert experience. COST \$12.50 <https://bit.ly/4jJN5yL>

KANSAS CITY

Sat., May 17, 11 am - Noon: Vegan Cooking Class with

She's KC Vegan, F.L. Schlagle Environmental Library, 4051 West Drive, Kansas City, KS. An exciting day of family-friendly cooking. Local chef and entrepreneur She's KC Vegan will be leading us on a culinary adventure. COST \$5 <https://bit.ly/42XDZIS>

Sat., May 17, 4-7 pm: Conversations 'N Cocktails: A Mix-HER with Fumée Chic & Uncle Nearest, Classic Blends Cigar & Coffee Lounge, 201 E. 21st Ave. Indulge in an evening spent savoring quality cigars while sipping signature cocktails featuring the palette pleasing deliciousness that only the exquisite smoothness of Uncle Nearest can provide. Relax and connect with other ladies eager to elevate their minds on the cigar and whiskey cultures. #LetsTalkAboutAboutIt COST \$15



The classic movie "Undercover Brother" is the first in a free summer classic movie series that will be held monthly in Wichita's McAdams Park.

Summer Classic Movies Under the Stars

Begins May 17 in McAdams Park

By Bonita Gooch
The Voice Editor-in-Chief

main attraction will begin at 8:30 p.m.

Looking for some fun and free ways to enjoy the summer, the great outdoors and socialize with friends?

"The event is free, we just ask you to come out and have a good time, and pick up your trash," says DJ Don, the man behind the events.

Then bring your lawn chairs, or enjoy from your car, a classic movie under the stars for FREE!

Last summer, Don would spin sounds in the park on Saturday evenings, but after Frankie Beverly of Maze died, he decided to show a Maze concert on the screen instead of just playing the group's songs. The event was a big hit.

Once a month, DT Unity Community Ent. in partnership with The Community Voice will bring you a free classic movie under the stars at Wichita's McAdams Park, along 13th Street.

That led to this summer series, with a social gathering and movie once a month through September. The Saturday dates are: June 4, July 12, Aug. 9, and Sept. 20.

The series kicks off on Sat., May 17, with the 2002 movie "Undercover Brother."

But these special outings are more than just a movie, they're a social gathering. Come early for socialization.

"We're developing themes for the upcoming months," says Don. "Definitely next month will be a Father's Day event. We're encouraging children to bring their fathers out for this event, the night before Father's Day."

DJ Don will be there starting at 5 p.m., providing the sounds. Bring your dominoes, cards, cornhole or other games.

"There's definitely going to be a 'Boots on the Ground'-themed night, so get ready," Don says. "We'll be promoting upcoming movies and themes in The Community Voice. Thank you to Bonita and her team, who have generously agreed to partner with us on this free community summer series."

Hungry? Bring your own food or purchase food from a food truck onsite. Grilling will be allowed, but we ask that all grilling stop by 7 p.m., to clear the smoke ahead of the movie.

Movie time begins at 8 p.m. and just like the AMC, we'll have a warmup before the movie. Enjoy videos from classic concerts by some of your favorite performers. The

Voice Launches Free Online Event Calendar

What's happening in your area? Find out online and promote your event for free.

By Bonita Gooch
The Voice Editor-in-Chief

What's happening? Don't miss an event in your community or a surrounding community in THE VOICE's new online calendar.

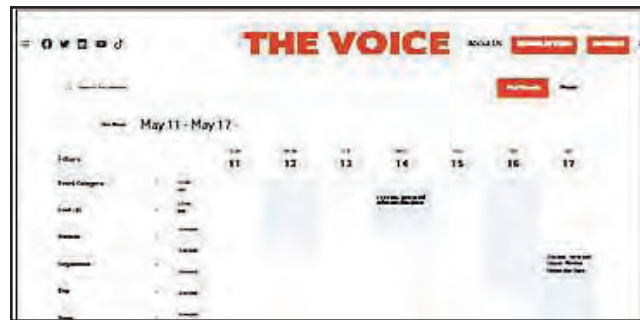
If you've been used to reading our event calendar in The VOICE print edition, we have great news. You no longer have to have a print edition of the paper to find out what's going on. Our extensive event calendar is now online.

Just head to our website CommunityVoiceKS.com and click on "calendar" on our toolbar.

It's a full-featured calendar and it's free to use.

The user-friendly calendar can be viewed by the month, week or day. In addition you can filter the calendar to just see events in your area or certain kinds of events. Looking for an art exhibit, workshop, or a P-A-R-T-Y, - no problem. Just filter the events category.

Not sure where that venue is



located or how to get there? No problem, the calendar includes a map for the event.

Now that the calendar is online, we will significantly cut back on the space we dedicate to events in our print edition. The good news is that it frees up space for more great stories.

Consider signing up for one of our calendars, where we will feature upcoming events. Great options are The Voice Monday KC and The Voice Monday Wichita, which will feature events coming up that week. Another option is the Friday Top 5, which will include events coming up for the weekend. Sign up for newsletters here

(<https://bit.ly/4kcSyhE>)

TO SUBMIT AN EVENT

It's also free to post your event.

Just like the rest of the calendar, submitting an event is easy. Click on "submit an event" - it's below "calendar" on the toolbar. Submissions can include an event flyer or related folder.

Submitting an event requires that you become a registered user of our website. That's pretty simple, all we require is your email. This step is required to eliminate spam content and for us to be able to monitor and eliminate inappropriate posts.

THE VOICE does maintain

Submit Your Juneteenth Events

It's starting to be that time, if you're planning a Juneteenth Event. Even though we're moving our calendar online, we will run a complete Juneteenth calendar of events in our June 13 print issue and as a special post on our website.

Send us your event info early. Deadline for events to be included in the print edition is June 6.

People are looking for ways to engage in Juneteenth. Make sure to let them know about your event.

the discretion to not accept events that don't meet our standards.

UPGRADE YOUR EVENT

If you want to promote your event further, reach out to our team and we'll discuss paid - but very affordable - options to feature your event.

Options include promoting your event in one of our weekly newsletters, in our print edition or through our social media options.

'The Lion King' Musical Preview: Q&A with Home-Grown Simba Erick D. Patrick

'The Lion King' comes to the KC Music Hall for 16 shows May 22 - June 1.

By **Thomas White**
Kansas City Reporter

When Disney's "The Lion King" roars into the Kansas City Music Hall from May 22 through June 1, a familiar face will play the lead role. Erick D. Patrick, who plays adult Simba in the North American tour, is an area native who graduated from Olathe South High School before launching his successful theater career.

For Patrick, the KC stop represents a heart-felt homecoming and a chance to perform for friends and family.

We recently spoke with Patrick about returning to his hometown, his journey to "The Lion King," and what audiences can expect from this iconic production.

What can folks expect from seeing "The Lion King" on stage vs the movie? It's so different. It's unlike anything people have seen before. There are more songs than in the movie, and the story is a little bit more fleshed out. But the biggest thing is the puppetry — it's truly one of a kind.

We're trained to use our bodies to work the mask or puppets, so it's like a "double event" happening on stage. There are certain movements where you could completely get the story based on just movement and puppet work alone if you weren't hearing what we were saying. I have two faces — a mask that's a big lion head, and my face that's also emotive. So no matter what you're looking at or what catches your eye, you're always getting the story.

How has your Kansas City background shaped your theater career? I was super fortunate in having an amazing theater program at Olathe South High School. I have to shout out to my theater director, who still teaches there, Mr. David Hastings. He is absolutely fantastic and one of the reasons why I am where I am today.

After high school, I went to the New York Conservatory for Dramatic Arts, which at the time had no singing or musical theater training. It was a two-year acting conservatory where all you did was act. That's really what I wanted to do — I started singing in church, but I always wanted to be an actor. I just happened to be able to sing, and now I do both.

Is there a certain big moment that audiences should look out for? Don't be late. Right at the beginning of the show, our opening number, "Circle of Life," is one that you cannot miss, and I've seen people miss it. I've seen the ushers have to close the doors — for your own good, don't be one of those people. Please come and be in your seats early. You have to see that number, it is genuinely magical.

How do you approach



Olathe, KS, native Erick D. Patrick stars as adult Simba in the upcoming tour performance of the award winning musical "The Lion King" in KC, May 22 - June 1.

(PHOTO: MATTHEW MURPHY)

playing Simba as a character? With all the roles I play, I try to always be as honest as possible to the story. I look at the text, and whatever the text is telling me is what I'll try my best to portray.

With Simba specifically, he's somewhere around 16, but he's not like today's 16 or 17-year-old. His growth is stunted because he's been in the jungle, away from his pride. He wasn't getting the care and life lessons he needed to learn. So he's more guarded; it's harder for him to be vulnerable. He gets angry, he gets upset when he's told he has to do something he doesn't want to do. I try to bring a childlike innocence to him until he makes that big turn at the end of the show, when all his memories come flooding back and he grows up.

What's it like bringing this production to your hometown? I'm just super excited to be back in my hometown and being able to perform for people I haven't seen in so long. With all the friends and family, it's going to be a special homecoming for me. I don't get a chance to go home that often, so when I do, I try to make the most of it.

What's it like preparing to play Simba physically and vocally? Just to play this role, there has to be a certain level of fitness.

So it takes a lot of work.

I try to do a lot of calisthenics — pull-ups, push-ups, sit-ups — and I run a lot. I try to do about 10 to 12 miles throughout the week. There's various stretching, and it goes back to diet, just making sure you eat pretty clean.

Vocally, it's also pretty demanding, especially for guys like me. I'm more of a tenor-baritone, not a super high singer, and some of Simba's parts are kind of high, so my vocal health is super important. It also goes back to the things you put in your body — not putting so much fat and sugar into your body, but also doing a proper 15-minute warm-up before the show begins.

Does that mean you skip the BBQ when you come to KC? Oh no, I'll be sure to stop by Gates.

The Lion King

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Connie S. Johnson-Roberts, 76

September 11, 1948 - April 23, 2025
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Todric A. McGee, 21

June 13, 2003 - April 19, 2025
 Service was held May 8 at Chapel Hills United Methodist Church.

Lincoln E. Moore, 93

Feb. 12, 1932 - April 19, 2025
 Service was held May 9 at Tabernacle Bible Church.



National Urban League | Empowering Communities. Changing Lives.

April 22, 2025
 AFFILIATE SERVICES BULLETIN #2

URBAN LEAGUE AFFILIATE CEO VACANCY

URBAN LEAGUE OF KANSAS. (Wichita, Kansas)
 President and Chief Executive Officer
 Salary Range: \$85,000 per annum, depending on training and experience.

The CEO/President should be prepared to enhance and expand mission-related services; attract, develop, and engage staff, board members, and supporters; and expand social entrepreneurship ventures. This will require the CEO/President to continue to strengthen the balance sheet and increase operational profits; sustain the organization's recent momentum; and lead it in new directions. A parallel priority will be to enhance community awareness of Urban League's mission and maintain its reputation. The new CEO/President should support and exemplify the organization's values and culture. Accordingly, in addition to the characteristics indicated above, the successful candidate must have a proven background of organizational leadership and administration; building community, government, and organization relationships; champion diversity and inclusion; customer-orientation, successful marketing and fund raising; board and staff collaboration and teamwork; possess superior communication skills; and leading creative and innovative programs and services.

For certification consideration, please submit a cover letter and resume to Ms. Leah George, Chair CEO Search Committee Urban League of Kansas, Inc. 2418 E 9th St. • Wichita, KS 67214 Email: ulceosearch@gmail.com include in the subject line – Urban League CEO by May 31, 2025.

Successful candidates must have a bachelor's degree (master's degree preferred) in business administration, social work, public administration, or an appropriate discipline from an accredited university, at least five years of senior level experience in business management, strategic planning, fiscal management, program development and administration, or a combination of the above. Three years of experience with a volunteer board or other demonstrated community leadership experience. Proven record of leadership and management of a community-based organization with at least five years of senior non-profit or for-profit management experience. Proven record of fund raising; proposal writing, organizational skills; written and oral communication skills; planning and evaluation skills; and general management skills. Prior experience within the Urban League Movement is desirable but not required.

The Urban League of Kansas was founded in 1954. The Urban League of Kansas manages a Family Resource Center which supports and strengthens families in the areas of housing education and fair housing counseling, financial literacy, health equity, education, career and workforce development, leadership and civic engagement. This affiliate is in the National Urban League's Central Region. Mr. Francois Djedjes is Board Chairperson.

URBAN LEAGUE EMPLOYEES WITH AN ACCEPTABLE LEVEL OF EXPERIENCE WOULD BE A PLUS PLEASE NOTE: THIS AFFILIATE MAY HAVE SPECIFIC NEED REQUIREMENTS NOT LISTED IN THIS ANNOUNCEMENT

Football, from Page 9 ↓

the program isn't optional, it's essential.

Participation in the once-popular league is falling rapidly. In 2019 there were 12 organizations participating in the league with 1,526 players. Last year, there were just five organizations and 433 players.

"I think everyone could see the writing on the wall," says Lara. "Unfortunately, if we keep down the same road, there won't be a league for these kids to play in."

"There's just more choices for

parents now," says Lara.

To survive in a more competitive environment, the city has to develop and offer a more competitive program.

The league has lost a lot of players to the Mid-State League, which was originally started for smaller rural cities. When Goddard and Mazie joined that league, they pulled off a lot of the Wichita league's more successful west-side teams. Since then, the Mid-State league has also pulled in Derby to the south and Andover to the east.

With those losses, the Wichita League had become

more of an inner-city league. However, even that core pull took a hit last year with the formation of the Midwest Valley Athletic Association, started by the Rev. Wade Moore at Urban Preparatory Academy.

With MVAA, the already struggling city league player count dropped 40%, from 721 players in 2023 to 433 in 2024. In late March 2025, MVAA announced it would not be operating a football league this year, opening up a number of those players to reconnect with the city league.

Lara is especially optimistic about the impact the school-based middle school program will have on the league. He believes an earlier association with the school district's athletic program will help attract a lot of players back to the Wichita League.

The reorganized league is also open to teams outside the city, as long as they associate with the school district where the players live.

"Over time, I think we'll start to get some of those new teams back," says Lara. "We may get a Maize or a Haysville or a Kapaun team. We don't want to just maintain; we want to grow."

Other League Concerns Addressed

In 2024 the league addressed concerns about safety and accountability at the games by having two Wichita Police officers at each junior league game. Added support also included one school resource officer at each game, as well as an official representative from USD 259 and the city.

This same security and accountability lineup will be in place at all games again this year.

With the city providing the uniforms, league administrators addressed concerns surrounding the safety of equipment provided by the community-run leagues as well as community-league financial issues that kept some teams from having uniforms until weeks into the season.

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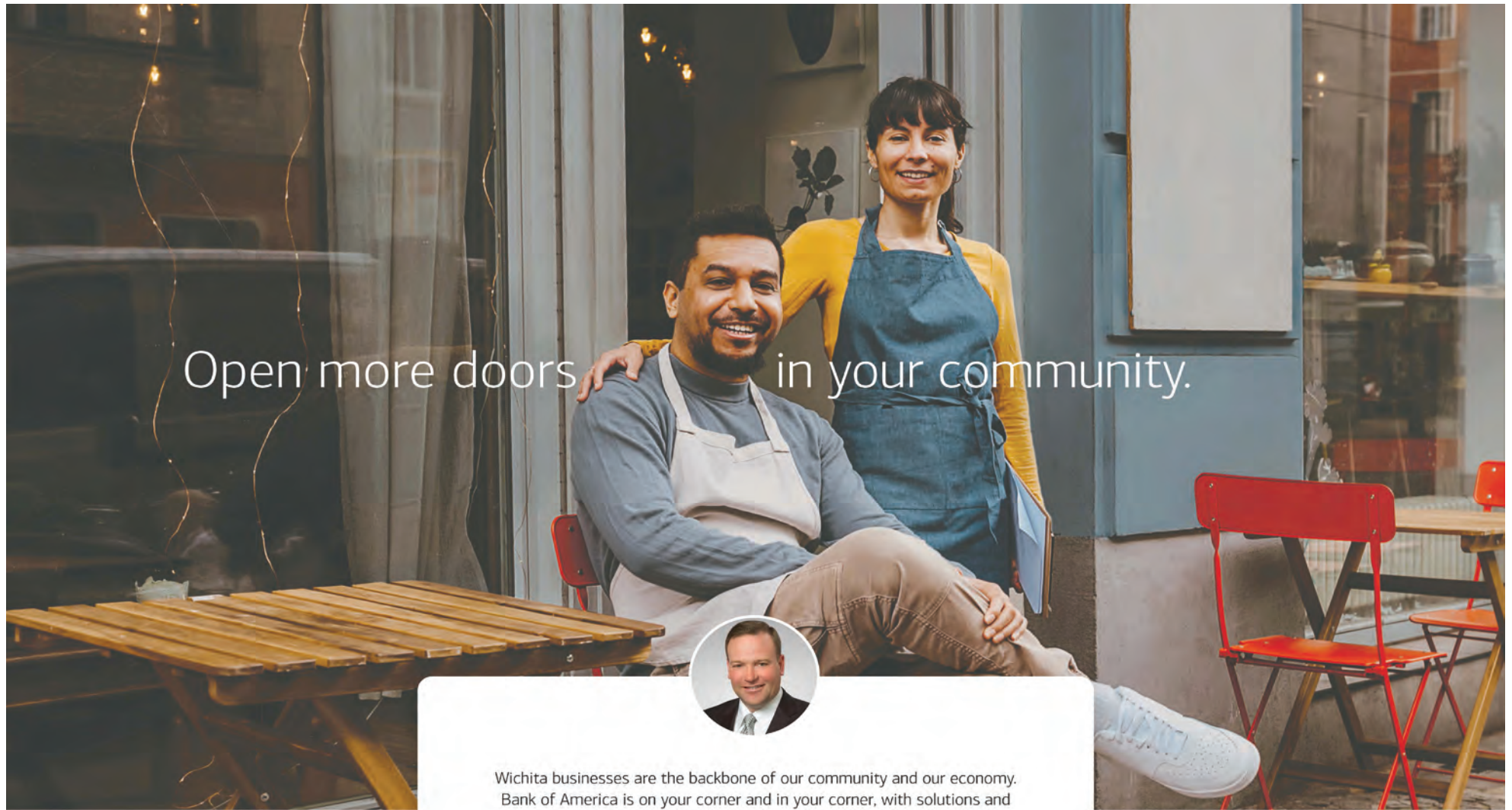
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