THE VOICE

A ce From The Community's Perspective

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Censure of Sen. David Haley Looks Like Politics, Not Just Ethics

By Bonita Gooch
Voice Editor-in-Chief

The recent censure and removal of **Sen. David Haley** as president of the Wyandotte County Board of Public Utilities (BPU) has the hallmarks of a political drama rather than a straightforward ethics case. In late September, an internal review concluded that Haley had improperly placed his long-term partner on the BPU health insurance plan despite not being married. Haley denied wrongdoing, insisting he received permission years ago from BPU leaders. The board, however, found no evidence of such approval and voted unanimously to censure him.

The timing is striking. The benefits in question had been in place for roughly four years, yet the allegations surfaced just weeks before Haley's re-election campaign for his at-large BPU seat. To Haley and many observers, that looked less like coincidence and more like an "October surprise," calculated to influence voters at the eleventh hour.

Meanwhile, former Kansas City, Kansas mayor **David Alvey had filed in June** to run for Haley's at-large BPU seat, even though a second at-large seat on the ballot had no incumbent. By bypassing the vacant position, Alvey signaled that his campaign was not just about joining the board but about confronting Haley head-on — a targeted challenge to one of Wyandotte County's most established political figures.

Together, the late-breaking censure and the calculated challenge raise questions about power plays in Wyandotte County politics. Was this an effort to hold Haley accountable, or a strategic strike designed to weaken a long-serving senator at the exact moment he faced a formidable challenger?

The answer may ultimately lie with the voters. They deserve transparency — from the BPU board about why this issue surfaced now, from Haley about the legitimacy of his actions, and from political challengers about whether this contest is truly about ethics or simply about power. Politics is rarely clean, and in Kansas City, Kansas, it appears the gloves have come off.

Sen David Haley, who was also elected to serve on the Board of Public Utilities for Wyandotte, was censured recently and stripped of his position as board president. Was it ethics or politics? *(RACHEL MIPRO/KANSAS REFLECTOR)*

BEHIND THE CARTOON: Trump Coin

By Clay Jones, Cartoonist

Unless the law prevails, and in most situations that involve Donald Trump, it doesn't, there will be a coin issued by the United States Treasury Department with Donald Trump's face on it.

The Treasury Department is developing a one-dollar commemorative coin featuring Donald Trump's horrid face in celebration of America's 250th birthday. This is not a joke. This is not a tacky meme coin. This is not a product of the Trump Campaign or the Trump Organization. This is being created by the federal government.

U.S. Treasurer Brandon Beach has tweeted the designs of the future coin, which features Trump on the head side, and an image of his "fight fight fight" moment on the tail, which means his face will be on the coin twice.

Beach wrote in his tweet, "Looking forward to sharing more soon, once the obstructionist shutdown of the United States government is over."

In the United States, federal law prevents putting living persons on our currency. But when has federal law ever stopped Donald Trump? It's not like the Emoluments Clause slows him down from grifting or engaging in business with foreign nations.

Does the regime now get that this is a look of fascism? They're already placing banners with Trump's face all over Washington, DC. And now they're going to violate the law and put his ugly mug on a coin. The only explanation is that they don't care how this looks, and if you make fun of Trump about it, they might arrest you.

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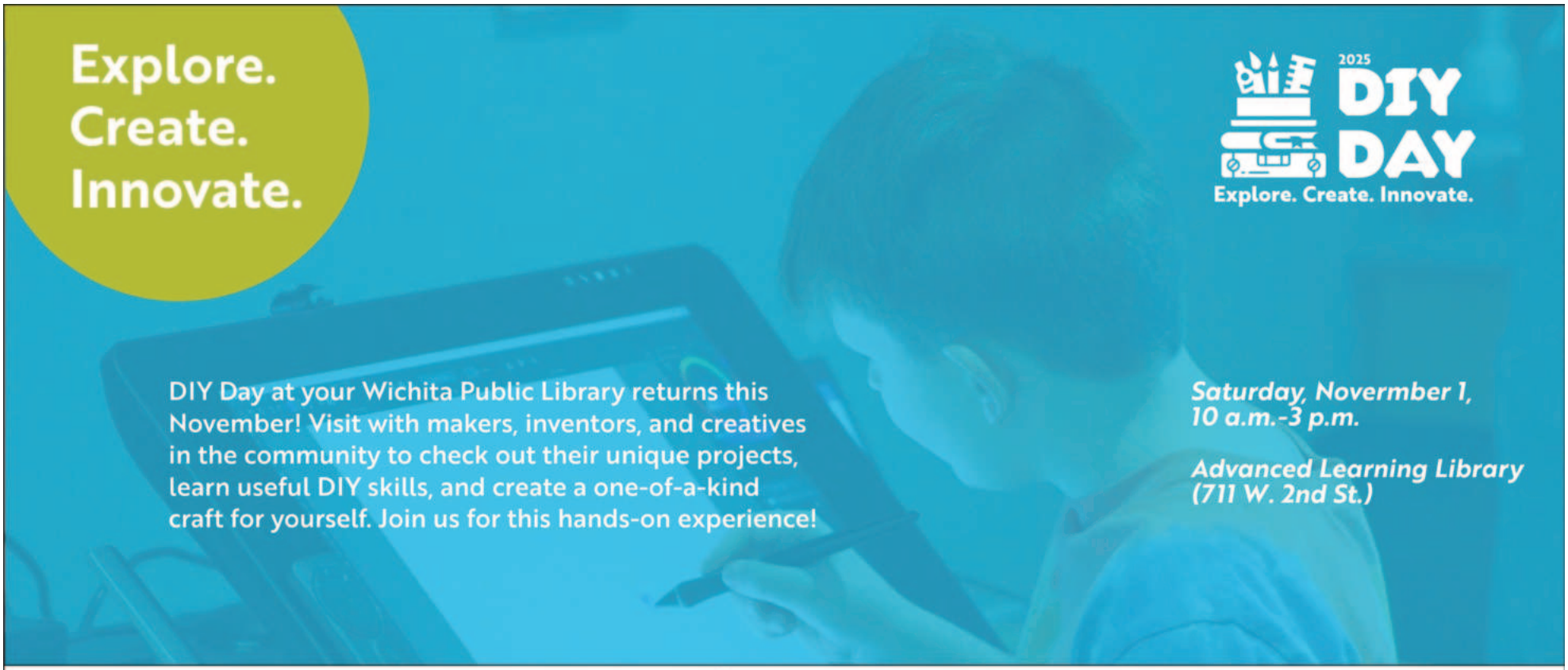

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UNI Expands Housing, Youth Programs as Moore Takes Helm

SHORT TAKEAWAYS:
- Sakina Moore rises from engagement director to interim CEO, guiding UNI's holistic neighborhood revitalization.
- Major projects include 39 Crescendo townhomes, the Unity Campus community hub, and a 100-home ownership pilot.
- UNI blends housing with youth and family programs, aiming for lasting change across 10 east-of-Troost neighborhoods.

Sakina Moore, interim CEO of Urban Neighborhood Initiative, and Jordan Gordon, COO of KCPS, at the unveiling of the UNI-provided book vending machine at Wendell Phillips Elementary School. The books in the vending machine were written by participants in the UNI Write Brain Program. Students can earn tokens based on good behavior and attendance to purchase a book from the vending machine.

Sakina Moore, interim CEO of Urban Neighborhood Initiative, stands in front of one of the homes the organization recently renovated in the Wendell Phillips neighborhood of KCMO.

By Bonita Gooch
Editor-in-Chief

The Wendell Phillips neighborhood — anchored by the American Jazz Museum, Negro Leagues Baseball Museum, the Black Archives, and the storied Mutual Musicians Foundation — has long been a crossroads of Kansas City's Black history.

Today, it's also the proving ground for a new wave of resident-centered redevelopment led by the Urban Neighborhood Initiative (UNI).

At the center of UNI's transition is Sakina Moore, a Kansas City native who rose from community engagement director (2022) to chief operating officer and, as of Aug. 1, interim president and CEO. Moore's path tells you a lot about UNI's culture: people who listen first, build trust block by block, and then scale what works.

"We're small but mighty," she says, describing a team of roughly 10 full-timers plus a roster of part-time contractors that deliver youth programs, mobile resource pop-ups, and a growing pipeline of affordable homes in Wendell Phillips.

Moore emphasized UNI's holistic approach: "We can't take care of the whole family without actually taking care of the whole family." That means pairing bricks-and-mortar projects with programs for kids and teens, neighborhood resource fairs, and a mobile engagement lab that brings the party — and the services — to the block.

From Engagement Lead to Interim CEO

When Dr. Jamee Rodgers took the helm in late 2021, he brought Moore on to lead community engagement. Within a year, she was COO, overseeing day-to-day operations. This summer, after Rodgers' four-year tenure concluded, UNI named Moore interim CEO.

Moore's personal Kansas City story — big family gatherings at her grandmother's Blue Hills home, neighbors who looked out for one another — shapes how she frames UNI's mission.

The goal, she says, is to rebuild that connective tissue while expanding pathways to homeownership and stability for families who've been squeezed by the city's affordable-housing shortage.

What UNI Is & How It Started

UNI was launched in 2012 as one of KC's most ambitious place-based efforts to counter disinvestment east of Troost. It serves a two-square-mile area across 10 neighborhoods, with priorities that can be summed up as: engage residents, elevate opportunity, educate youth, and encourage mixed-income housing.

The Urban Neighborhood Initiative's founding leader was Diane Cleaver, who directed the program for a decade before handing the reins to Rodgers.

The organization began by listening. Through neighborhood sessions across its 10 target communities, UNI identified priorities and translated them into early programming. In 2016, UNI joined the national Purpose Built Communities network, an affiliation that spurred expansion into housing and real estate development while sustaining resident wellness and engagement.

The Projects Taking Shape Right Now

Crescendo Townhomes (39 units)

The most visible sign of momentum is Crescendo, a 39-unit townhome development rising near 24th Street and Highland. UNI and partner Brinshore Development closed on the project this summer and officially broke ground in early October. The aim: high-quality homes affordable to families earning up to roughly 80% of area median income.

The Former Wendell Phillips School "Unity Campus"

Across the street, UNI has acquired the old Wendell Phillips Elementary from Kansas City Public Schools and is redeveloping it into a multi-phase community hub sometimes referred to as the Unity Campus. Plans include spaces for youth mental-health services, transitional living, partner organizations, and community use.

A Pathway to Homeownership — Powered by Federal Investment

On the single-family side, UNI is advancing a "pathway to homeownership" program that builds or renovates 3-bed/2-bath homes in Wendell Phillips and supports residents in renting while they repair credit, line up down-payment help, and ultimately assume the loan. UNI

See **MOORE** Page **7** →

Weekend Includes Organization's Annual Summit

The Summit of The Black MasterMinds, the organization's annual multi-day event focused on building, financing, and scaling Black-owned businesses, is timed this year to coincide with the plaza opening. In addition to the marketplace launch, the weekend features both free and ticketed sessions. Full summit registration ($129) includes access to all events and exclusive workshops.

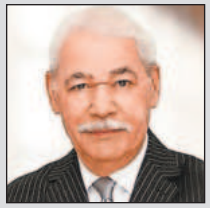
Events Include:

Thu., Oct. 16 — Pitch Day (10 a.m.–4 p.m., private) Entrepreneurs compete for $35,000 in seed funding: $20,000 for Legacy Plaza incubator businesses, $10,000 for MasterMind Boot Camp alumni, and $5,000 for marketplace vendors. Winners will be announced at Saturday's awards dinner.

Fri., Oct. 17 — Road2Capital Forum (1:30–3 p.m., free) Learn insider strategies for securing funding and connect with lenders ready to invest. Participating partners include Arvest, BMO, Capitol Federal, U.S. Bank, and KIVA Microloan Fund.

Fri., Oct. 17 — Speed Networking (6:30–10:30 p.m., $25) A fast-paced evening designed to help entrepreneurs build connections and spark collaborations.

Fri.–Sat., Oct. 17–18 — Summit Conference & Awards ($129 registration) Registered attendees can attend special summit-only workshops and all ticketed events. Keynote presenters include **Dr. George Fraser,** a nationally recognized author and entrepreneur known for his work on networking, wealth-building, and business success.



George Fraser

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Holiday Grand Opening of Legacy Park Plaza Kicks Off Black MasterMind Summit

By Bonita Gooch
Editor-in-Chief

In 2021, Dr. Donnetta Watson (white coat) celebrated the opening of the Mastermind Entrepreneurial Resource and Training Center, in the same strip shopping plaza the organization now owns. This month, they'll celebrate the opening of their expanded training center and incubator space as well as the temporary opening of the Black Dotte Marketplace space.

The Black MasterMind Group (TBMMG) is preparing for an initial grand opening of Legacy Park Plaza, its long-awaited business and community hub in downtown KCK, just in time for the 2025 holiday season.

The opening will anchor the organization's signature Summit of The Black MasterMinds (Oct. 16–19), a four-day celebration of Black entrepreneurship that will draw hundreds of founders, lenders, and supporters to the site.

The opening, which will be celebrated with a ribbon cutting on Fri., Oct. 17, at 10:15 a.m., marks a major milestone for the nonprofit. TBMMG initially announced plans to purchase and renovate the aging Gateway Plaza strip center at 1121–1123 N. 5th Street, in early 2024, with plans to transform it into a thriving ecosystem for small business growth.

Though work on the plaza is still underway, TBMMG is opening with temporary improvements, but without its kitchens, to allow retail businesses to benefit from the busy holiday shopping season.

"We white-boxed the space to get doors open and vendors selling for the holidays," said founder and CEO Dr. Donnetta Watson. "Kitchens and permanent fixtures will follow during a short shutdown in January — retail's slowest month — so we can come back strong early in the new year."

What the Original Plan Promised

TBMMG acquired and began redesigning the 25,000-sq.-ft. strip center with help from a $1.4 million BASE (Building a Stronger Economy) grant from the Kansas Dept. of Commerce. The grant supports infrastructure projects that drive local economic growth.

The project is a cornerstone of TBMMG's vision to build a stronger Black business infrastructure in Wyandotte County. The Legacy Park Plaza concept — described by Watson as a "micro-mall" — combines a Black Dotte Marketplace for retail and food, a TBMMG's business incubator and a 200-seat conference and event center

Initial designs call for half the space to serve the Black Dotte Marketplace, featuring six food businesses and ten retail storefronts. TBMMG's current training and incubator area at the north end will expand to include redesigned classrooms,and offices for service businesses.

The Black MasterMind Group purchased and is renovating the 25,000 sq. ft. shopping plaza, just over the bridge in Kansas City, KS and turning into a business and community hub.

Grand Opening with Service and Pop-Up Retail

The Oct. 17 ribbon cutting will also launch seven service businesses and eight retail businesses that completed TBMMG's training program. Additional entrepreneurs will participate in the 90-day "Pop-Up" Black Dotte Marketplace for the holiday season. Some of those businesses will qualify to begin the process of becoming a permanent vendor in the marketplace.

"While permanent vendors are in the facility, it's a three-year process of training and development to run a business and qualify for capital," Watson explained. "At the end of three years, we'll be launching them into their own space."

Grand opening festivities will extend into the parking lot with tents featuring additional vendors and community organizations who will only be on site Friday and Saturday.

Permanent hours for the Marketplace will be Mon. - Sat., 10 a.m. - 6 p.m., and Sun., noon to 5 p.m.

Permanent Construction Buildout

After the 90-day opening, the marketplace will close for 30 to 45 days to complete kitchens and permanent buildout. During the initial

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Sodas — Regular or Diet — *Tied to Higher Liver Disease Risk*

QUICK TAKEAWAYS

- Both sugary and diet sodas raise liver risk — just one can daily was linked to a 50–60% higher chance of nonalcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD).
- Water makes a difference — replacing sodas with water cut risk by 13–15%.
- Global concern — with nearly 40% of Americans affected by NAFLD, findings challenge the idea that diet sodas are a safe alternative.

By Associated Press

Drinking as little as one can of diet soda a day may increase the risk of nonalcohol fatty liver disease by 60%, while drinking a sugary beverage could raise the risk by 50%, a new unpublished study found.

Nonalcoholic fatty liver disease, or NAFLD, is a condition in which fat builds up in the liver of people who drink little to no alcohol. The damage can be similar to what's seen in a heavy drinker and lead to cirrhosis — advanced scarring of the liver — as well as liver cancer.

The condition, which is also called metabolic dysfunction-associated steatotic liver disease, or MASLD, is one of the leading causes of liver cancer. It's estimated that NAFLD has increased by 50% in the United States within the past three decades — today, some 38% of the population has the condition.

"Sugar sweetened beverages (SSBs) have long been under scrutiny, while their 'diet' alternatives are often seen as the healthier choice," said lead study author Lihe Liu, a graduate student in the department of gastroenterology at the First Affiliated Hospital of Soochow University, in Suzhou, China.

"Our study shows that LNSSBs (low- or non-sugar-sweetened beverages) were actually linked to a higher risk of MASLD, even at modest intake levels such as a single can per day," Liu said in a statement.

Consuming diet beverages was also linked to a higher risk of dying from liver disease, according to the abstract, a one-page summary of the paper before it is peer-reviewed and published in a journal. The research was presented Monday in Berlin at the United European Gastroenterology Week, an annual conference of the European Society of Gastrointestinal Endoscopy.

"These findings challenge the common perception that these drinks are harmless and highlight the need to reconsider their role in diet and liver health, especially as MASLD emerges as a global health concern," Liu said.

Sugary and diet sodas raise liver disease risk. With nearly 40% of the U.S. population now having nonalcohol fatty liver disease.

How Diet and Sugary Beverages Affect The Liver

The study followed nearly 124,000 people without liver disease participating in the UK Biobank, a large biomedical research study that follows people in the United Kingdom. The type and frequency of beverage consumption was assessed using 24-hour dietary questionnaires at various points throughout the 10-year study.

In addition to the connection between diet and sugar sodas and nonalcoholic fatty liver disease, the study found participants who substituted water reduced risk by nearly 13% for sugary beverages and over 15% for diet drinks. Switching from sugary drinks to diet drinks (or vice versa) did not lower risk.

The study provides "direct evidence of dietary behaviors influencing MASLD" and contradicts a prior analysis that found diet drinks could be substituted for water, said Sajid Jalil, clinical associate professor of gastroenterology and hepatology at Stanford University School of Medicine in California. He was not involved with the study.

"The study showed that both regular and diet soft drinks may harm the liver over time, while choosing water or unsweetened drinks could help protect it," Jalil said in an email. "For me this study has a lot more weight than previous studies because of its prospective design, involving large number of subjects, validated test for the diagnosis of MASLD and a long follow up."

Why Would Sugary and Diet Drinks Have Such an Impact on the Liver?

In sugary beverages, the higher sugar content causes rapid spikes in blood glucose and insulin, which can promote weight gain, Liu said. Excess sugar can also drive fat accumulation in the liver.

Although low in calories, diet drinks may still affect liver health through several pathways, she said.

"They can change the gut microbiome, interfere with feelings of fullness, increase preference for sweet foods and even stimulate insulin secretion," Liu said. "Water, however, hydrates the body without affecting metabolism, helps with satiety and supports overall metabolic function.

"That's why the risk reduction is similar no matter which sweetened drink is replaced — it shows that water is the healthiest default beverage."

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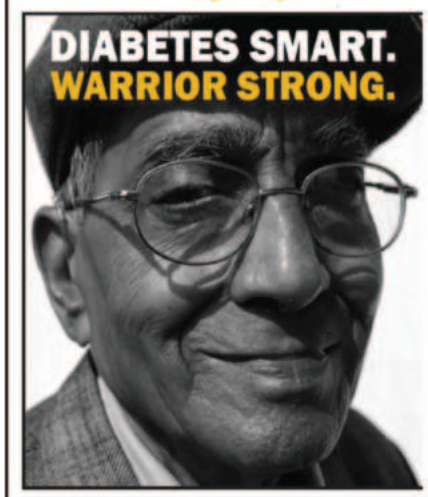

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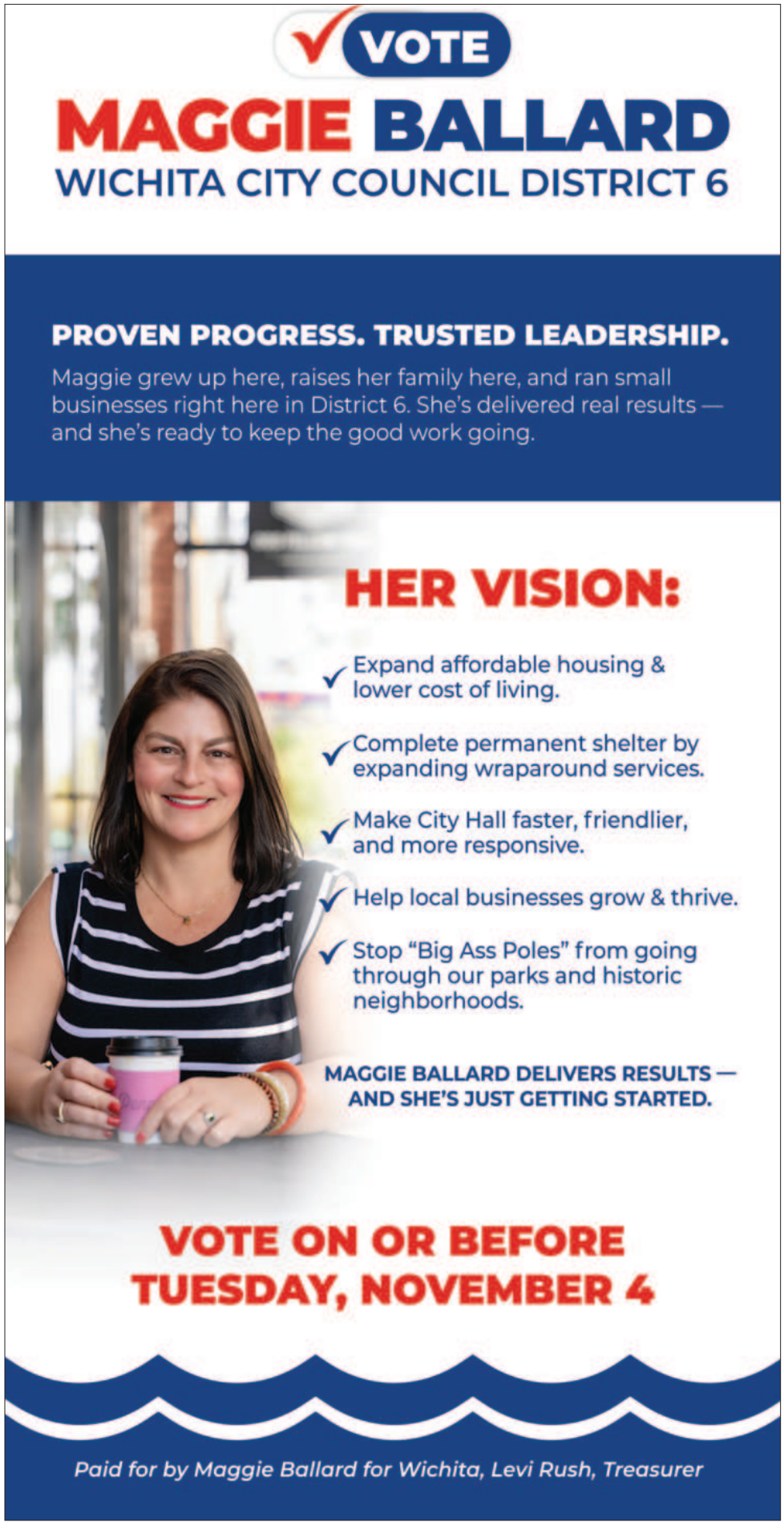

MOORE, from Page **4** ↓

already owns 100 empty lots in the Wendell Phillips neighborhood they can build on. Congressman Emanuel Cleaver secured $4 million in Federal Community Project Funding to help kick-start this program.

Programs That Meet People Where They Are

If housing is the backbone, engagement is the heartbeat. UNI's Mobile Leadership and Arts Building (the "M-LAB") is a 30-foot trailer that unfolds into a block-party-ready stage, complete with screens, games, and concessions — an all-ages magnet that helps UNI canvas neighborhoods, host resource fairs, and bring partner agencies directly to residents.

UNI's youth portfolio carries the same "do what the partner needs" DNA. Under a STEAM-plus umbrella, programs include coding, robotics, culinary arts, and more. A Writing Lab has helped third-to-fifth graders author 150–200 student books now shelved in school and public libraries.

Taken together, these programs underscore UNI's belief that community transformation requires more than bricks and mortar. By pairing housing development with creative youth programs, neighborhood gatherings, and mobile outreach, UNI is putting its holistic model into action — supporting family members at every stage of life.

The Leadership Moment

Moore steps in at a hinge moment: big capital projects are moving from plan to construction and a 100-home pilot has dedicated federal dollars for affordable housing.

Moore is also keenly aware that doing the work isn't enough if people don't see it. "We're trying to get better about telling our story," she says. That's a challenge many service-heavy nonprofits face, with the louder organizations not always delivering the most.

Diane Cleaver, founding CEO of Urban Neighborhood Initiative, and UNI Board Chair Dan Cranshaw attend the ceremonial ground breaking for UNI's Crescendo Townhomes. The 39-unit affordable-housing project near 24th and Highland will rent to families that earn up to 80% of the area's Average Median Income.

What to Watch Next

- Construction milestones on Crescendo's first phase.
- Partner announcements for the Unity Campus.
- Progress in the 100-home pilot and early sales.

SUMMIT, from Page **5** ↓

The Organization Behind the Project

The Black MasterMind Group is a nonprofit dedicated to educating and empowering Black entrepreneurs through its eight-week business boot camp — offered four times a year — and a three-year incubator program for graduates.

Watson says TBMMG was designed to address barriers that keep many minority-owned startups from scaling.

"Most banks lend to businesses that are expanding, not to those still trying to survive," Watson told The Community Voice in a 2024 interview. "Eighty-seven percent of Black entrepreneurs never qualify for traditional loans. We focus on documentation, capital readiness, and fundable business models so more of our businesses can become sustainable and scalable."

The Broader Bet: From Pop-ups to Permanence

When Watson first surveyed KCK's retail corridors, she found only about a dozen Black-owned brick-and-mortar businesses (excluding liquor stores). The most recent count is around three dozen, though some have since closed. The Legacy Park Plaza program aims to add roughly 30 more — by offering low-barrier entry, shared services, and training that help pop-up vendors become permanent entrepreneurs.

EVENTS, from Page **5** ↓

Sat., Oct. 18 — Financial Literacy, Homeownership & Entrepreneurship Forum (8:30 a.m.–2:30 p.m., free) Presented in partnership with U.S.Bank, this session for the community, equips participants with tools for building wealth through entrepreneurship and homeownership.

Sat., Oct. 18 — Black Tie Awards Dinner (7:30–10:30 p.m., $50) An elegant evening recognizing sponsors, pitch winners, and outstanding graduates.

Sun., Oct. 19 — Graduation & Celebration (9:30 a.m.–2 p.m., $28) Includes morning worship and a cap-and-gown ceremony for 2025 graduates, followed by a luncheon for students and families.

Medicare Open Enrollment: Key Changes for 2026

The Medicare open enrollment period runs from October 15 to December 7, giving adults age 65 and older the opportunity to enroll in the federally funded health program or make changes to their current plans.

While much of Medicare will remain the same in 2026 as it was in 2025, there are several important updates that recipients should pay attention to—especially around premiums, prescription drug coverage, and increases in some premiums.

"Open enrollment is the opportunity to look at your current plan and add or remove benefits," said Kanwar Kelley, MD, the co-founder and chief executive officer of Side Health in Orinda, CA.

"Because plans can change annually, it is a good idea to review your plan to ensure it is working well for you. If not, make adjustments to ensure you are satisfied with your coverage," Kelley told Healthline.

Having the right Medicare plan and benefits programs can save people money and help them stay healthy. Research shows that a majority (69%) of Medicare beneficiaries do not compare their coverage options during Open Enrollment, potentially impacting their costs and benefits.

With the poverty rate among older Americans now at 15%, it's critical that individuals take the time to select the most cost-efficient plan for their needs. A recent report from the National Council on Aging (NCOA) found that older adults with an annual income of $20,000 or less die on average nine years earlier than those who make $120,000 or more per year.

Single beneficiaries with an income of $1,976/month and couples with an income of $2,664/month should check if they are eligible for these programs that can help them afford their coverage:

• **Medicare Savings Programs** (MSPs) help eligible beneficiaries pay for Medicare premiums, deductibles, and co-insurance. NCOA's Benefits Participation Map shows that only 46.4% of eligible individuals are enrolled in the program and 2.3 million people are eligible but not enrolled.

• The **Medicare Part D Low-Income Subsidy** (LIS) can save eligible beneficiaries an average of almost $500 per month on prescriptions. More than 2 million adults 65+ who are eligible for LIS are not enrolled.

Medicare Changes in 2026

Key changes to Medicare in 2026 include:

• If a Medicare Part D plan has a deductible, enrollees will pay 100% of their covered prescription drug costs until the deductible of up to $615 for 2026 is met. This is an increase of $25 over the 2025 amount.

See ENROLLMENT Page 16 →

What Do Medicare Parts Cover?

Part A: Hospital insurance. Covers inpatient hospital stays, skilled nursing facility care, hospice, and some home health services. Most people don't pay a monthly premium.

Part B: Medical insurance. Covers outpatient services like doctor visits, preventive screenings, ambulance services, and durable medical equipment. Premiums are usually deducted from Social Security checks.

Part D: Prescription drug coverage. Helps pay for the cost of medications, including many vaccines. Offered through stand-alone plans or bundled with Medicare Advantage plans.

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Vibrant Voices Expo Offers Seniors Resources, Workshops, and Fun

By Voice Vibrant Voices Team

Seniors in Wichita will have a unique opportunity to learn, connect, and celebrate at the **Vibrant Voices Senior Expo**, hosted by The Community Voice, on **Fri., Oct. 24,** from noon to 5:30 p.m. at the **Saint Mark United Methodist Church Family Life Center**, 1525 N. Lorraine.

Designed for adults 55 and older, the Expo combines practical resources, interactive workshops, and cultural programming with social and recreational activities. It reflects The Community Voice's 30-year mission to provide information and opportunities that empower readers and strengthen communities.

A Full Afternoon of Programming

The day begins at **12 p.m. when the Expo floor opens** with vendors representing health plans, health care providers, housing and home repair programs, financial and insurance providers, cultural and lifestyle organizations, and more. Visitors can browse displays, talk with representatives, and collect information on products and services tailored to their needs.

At 1 p.m., the first of a series of half-hour workshops begin. New sessions will start every 30 minutes through 3:30 p.m., allowing attendees to choose from workshops that most meet their needs. Workshops will cover a wide range of subjects, from Medicare 2026 updates and estate planning basics to fall prevention, nutrition, caregiving programs, and technology for beginners. A session on artificial intelligence will help demystify this fast-growing trend and explain how seniors might use or encounter it in everyday life.

One timely focus is the Medicare enrollment period, which opens Oct. 15. **"The Expo is especially timed to coincide with the Medicare enrollment season,"** said Bonita Gooch, editor-in-chief of The Community Voice. "We've invited representatives from several health plans and the Senior Health Insurance Counseling program, so seniors can get their questions answered before choosing their 2026 coverage."

Other high-interest sessions include **fraud and scam prevention, taught by AARP Kansas**, and estate planning, which Gooch said is an increasingly important topic. "We're seeing too many of our seniors not taking the right steps to protect their assets and to pass on generational wealth," she said. "Too often, people don't have the paperwork in place to avoid probate, to ensure their property transfers smoothly, or to protect against family disputes. We want to help our seniors take steps that strengthen families and futures."

Fun, Friends & Community

The Vibrant Voices Expo isn't just about learning — it's about having fun and enjoying community. For those who prefer a more social track, the event will also feature **Black Trivia** games with prizes and dominoes, just for fun.

At 4 p.m., the Expo closes on a high note with the **"Dance for Grown-Ups," sponsored by AARP Kansas.** This Motown-themed dance party will feature Wichita's popular **line dance** instructor Charles Coleman, who will lead familiar dances and teach a few new steps. Organizers emphasize that dancing is more than entertainment — it supports physical health, boosts mood, and offers the joy of socializing together.

"It's going to be an **informative but fun** afternoon," Gooch said. "We look forward to seeing many of our old friends — and making new ones."

VIBRANT VOICES EXPO

When: Fri., Oct. 24, Noon to 5:30 p.m.

Where: Saint Mark UMC Family Life Center, 1515 N. Lorraine, Wichita, KS

What: Workshops, Vendors, Door Prizes, Medicare 2026 Enrollment Info, Closing Grown Ups Party, Line Dancing, Black Trivia, Games

Admission & Door Prizes

Admission to the Vibrant Voices Senior Expo is $10. Tickets may be purchased in advance online at communityvoiceks.com (click on "More" and then "Vibrant Expo Tickets") or by scanning the QR code in the ad on page 16 of this issue.

Door prizes will be drawn throughout the day, but winners must be present to claim them — giving attendees one more reason to enjoy the full program.

Bringing It All Together

With vendors, workshops, door prizes, refreshments, trivia, games, and a closing dance party, the Vibrant Voices Senior Expo promises to be both informative and entertaining. It's an opportunity for Wichita's seniors to take charge of their health, finances, and lifestyle — and to connect with others in a supportive, culturally rich environment.

Strong Social Connections

A Surprising Key to Healthy Aging

Come to Vibrant Voices Expo: It's Good for Your Health

There's no healthy aging "magic bullet" — no single exercise, food or pill that can guarantee a long, healthy life. But there may be something that comes close: strong social connections..

"Over many years of taking care of older patients, I've learned that the factors many people think are most important for aging well — such as having longevity in your family or lack of physical illnesses — do not guarantee a positive experience with getting older," says Dr. Amit A. Shah, a geriatrician at the Mayo Clinic. "It's the quality, duration and nature of your relationships that seem to matter most."

"People are often surprised by the literature that shows a correlation between social contact and enormous health benefits," he says. "Interacting with others is exercise for your brain — it's one of the best ways to improve your cognitive flexibility. It's likely more beneficial than doing crossword puzzles or other brain games."

The Health Risks of Social Isolation

"We hear so much about the risks of obesity and smoking, but loneliness and social isolation are just as much of a health risk," Shah says.

Health risks associated with loneliness can include depression, anxiety, increased risk of suicide and other chronic health risks. Studies have shown that for certain people, factors like social isolation, loneliness and poor social relationships are associated with increased risk of:

- Premature death.
- Dementia.
- Heart disease.
- Stroke.

ENROLLMENT, from Page **16** ↓

• The **cap on out-of-pocket prescription drug costs** will rise to $2,100, a $100 increase over the 2025 limit. This means beneficiaries will be responsible for an additional $100 in drug costs.

• Beneficiaries who participate in the **Medicare Prescription Drug Payment Plan** (MPP) will automatically be re-enrolled for the following year unless they opt out. These plans spread out drug costs over the year.

• **Medicare telehealth will revert to pre-pandemic limitations** unless Congress agrees to extend them in the FY26 funding bill, currently being debated as part of the federal government shutdown.

Where to Get Help

People on Medicare can get free help reviewing their plan by contacting their local State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP) office. SHIPs are in every state, and they offer in-depth and objective insurance counseling to Medicare-eligible individuals, their families, and caregivers.

Individuals can also check if they may be eligible for Medicare low-income programs by using NCOA's free BenefitsCheckup.org website or calling the toll-free helpline at 844-902-2425, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. ET.

LaTonia Kennedy: From Gordon Parks Success to Leading Family Engagement District-wide

By Bonita Gooch
Editor-in-Chief

When LaTonia Kennedy talks about her new job, she doesn't start with programs or acronyms. She starts with people: "It's going to take the whole community to get families and students where they need to be."

As Wichita Public Schools' (USD 259) Director of Family and Community Engagement, Kennedy is charged with turning that belief into a system—one that helps students by supporting families and partnering with the community.

Before stepping into her current position, Kennedy had already earned the community's trust as the successful principal of Gordon Parks Academy. Under her leadership, Gordon Parks thrived—test scores rose, students traveled to Paris, and families across Wichita sought enrollment.

To say the community was "sad" to see her leave is an understatement, but in her new role she continues to make a positive difference.

Reflecting on the transition, she explains: "As a principal, I could change the trajectory of students' lives. In this role, I can create partnerships that change the trajectory of families. That's just as impactful."

A New Role Centered on Families

At the heart of the portfolio of programs she oversees is a new Community Schools pilot, a national strategy now underway at seven Wichita schools. Kennedy says the program connects families with needed community resources.

The pilot is being implemented exclusively in Title I schools—the district's highest-poverty schools, where there is often a gap between family needs and family resources. Each school has a Community School Coordinator who starts with a needs assessment—identifying what families say they need most—and then builds partnerships to bring in outside support.

A Title I grant pays for the site coordinators' salaries without tapping the district's general funds. The Wichita Federation of Teachers introduced the program after studying a model in Albuquerque and partnered with district leaders and the board to bring it home.

For Kennedy, seeing the union, district, and board working together so collaboratively was powerful—and it set the tone for the program itself, which relies on cooperation at every level.

At schools such as Adams and Stanley, coordinators helped secure on-site washers and dryers through a Whirlpool grant so families can do laundry at school. For many families, this simple addition meets a very real need.

At Stanley, a partnership with the church next door connects families to fresh produce boxes. Coordinators are developing ESOL/English classes for parents in buildings with large Spanish-speaking populations. And in a notable collaboration with DCF, staff can connect families to services before a concern escalates into a full case—flipping the script from punishment to support.

LaTonia Kennedy, Wichita Public Schools' director of family and community engagement, coordinates programs connecting families with resources and building stronger school-community partnerships.

More Programming

Kennedy's second major area of focus is the district's network of Family Engagement Contacts—one in every Title I school. These are often classroom teachers who receive a stipend to plan literacy nights, math nights, and conference-time learning activities that include a clear educational component (not just entertainment) for families. Title I can cover child care so parents can attend Family Engagement Programming.

Kennedy's team supports these staffers with professional development, materials, and logistics, ensuring every event is purposeful and accessible.

She also champions the state-mandated School Site Councils, which bring teachers, administrators, students, families, community leaders, and local businesses to the same table at least three times a year. These councils don't make policy, but they do surface concerns and shape strategies tied to student success.

A fourth pillar is the African American Student Advisory Council, a monthly gathering of community leaders focused on removing barriers to Black students' success. Out of that work came Scholar Sideline Support, a new collaboration between Wichita Public Schools, Wichita Collective Impact, and Wichita Parks & Recreation that takes district and community resources to youth sporting events—where families already are. Think: the library bus signing kids up for cards, information on district programs and supports, community partners on site, and a family-friendly atmosphere with snacks and prize drawings. "We've just got to go to them, and that's what we're doing," Kennedy says.

Her department also includes the Parent and Community Support Network, led by Carla Clement, a veteran problem-solver who mediates concerns between families and the district to find practical resolutions.

A Career Rooted in Education

If the first half of Kennedy's story is systems, the second half explains why she's so good at building them.

Kennedy, who grew up in Overton, Texas, married and followed her high-school sweetheart to Wichita and found a home at USD 259 in 1990, starting as an elementary teacher.

Early on, she left the district to raise the couple's four children but couldn't stop teaching. She founded the Learning Express Educational Center where she provided structured-literacy tutoring for students with dyslexia—often on a sliding scale so families could afford it.

See KENNEDY Page 14 →

STILL BUILDING, STILL REBUILDING

The Polite Family Honors a Father's Dream

By Ty Davis & Bonita Gooch
The Community Voice

In the heart of Northeast Wichita, an old Head Start building has found new life. Inside, young people record podcasts, study for GED exams, design T-shirts, and talk openly with mentors who understand their lives.

This is **Build & Rebuild Educational Ministries** — a faith-grounded community hub continuing the legacy of its late founder, **Dr. William "Buggs" Polite.**

Polite's vision was simple yet profound: "Replace prison walls with school halls." Through mentorship, academic guidance, and spiritual grounding, Build & Rebuild gives young people a safe space to grow, reflect, and dream bigger.

Today, the ministry is led by his children — **William Polite Jr., Brandon Polite,** and **Eboni Polite Armstrong** — along with longtime colleague **Hercules Finley,** who helped shape the program from the start.

A Foundation Built on Faith & Family

William Polite's story began in Wichita, where faith, family, and service shaped his earliest lessons. His mother, **evangelist Mother Dilce Polite,** spent more than 50 years ministering in prisons and caring for men re-entering society. Her home became a haven for those trying to rebuild their lives.

As a child, Polite witnessed ex-prisoners living in his family's home. In later years, he reflected on that time: He saw sharp, intelligent people in those rooms and wondered how one decision or circumstance had led them to incarceration. That question became part of his life's purpose — how do we intervene before the arrest record?

A gifted mathematician with a deep spiritual center, Polite's belief in the power of education carried him far — across the country in school-leadership roles — before returning home. In Wichita, he first opened the **Build & Rebuild Math Academy** on South Laura Street, then joined **Wichita Public Schools (USD 259)** as **executive director of diversity, equity and accountability.**

Within the district, he designed programs that still shape practice today. **Better Academics and Social Excellence (BAASE)** helped improve academic outcomes for Black male students by linking achievement with accountability. **Future Ready Advocate Mentors (FRAM)** placed positive Black men in schools to serve as consistent role models.

He also created **Books Over Balls,** reminding students that the "student" must come before the "athlete," and **Engaging Congregations for Future Readiness,** which strengthened partnerships between churches and schools. Together, these initiatives remain active parts of USD 259's equity and mentorship work.

Polite often told students and colleagues, "You have to build the mind before you can rebuild the man." That conviction became his life's guiding principle.

"Protect Your Mind": The Blueprint for Change

Before Build & Rebuild took shape as a community ministry, Polite wrote a workbook and curriculum called **"Protect Your Mind."** It taught young people to guard their thoughts from destructive influences — anger, hopelessness, violence, and peer pressure — through faith, self-discipline, and reflection.

The message was simple but potent: If your mind is safe from corrosive thinking — anger, despair, addiction — then the path forward is more stable.

"That was his first major project," said Brandon Polite. "It was meant to stop the cycle early, to help kids protect their minds so their outcome isn't death or prison. Build & Rebuild came after that."

The curriculum spread through schools and juvenile facilities and remains the heartbeat of today's ministry. Its lessons — on accountability, life skills, and spiritual renewal — still guide every classroom, conversation, and outreach.

Finley explained in earlier interviews that Protect Your Mind "changes the heart of a child through life skills and spiritual truth — and that changes direction."

The Work Continues

When Polite passed away in April 2025, his children didn't hesitate.

"It wasn't even a question — it was automatic," said William Polite Jr., creative director of Build & Rebuild. "Dad told us since we were little that it would be on us to continue. We just approached it like it was our turn to get in the game."

"He trained us for this moment," added Brandon Polite. "Our biggest challenge is not having him here. I still catch myself wanting to call him for advice or to hear him say, 'You're doing good — keep going.' But we know the work has to continue."

Their first task was

See **POLITE** Page **15** →

William Polite with daughter Eboni Polite Armstrong, a principal in USD 259. Standing with him are many of the mentors with the Future Ready program he helped establish at USD 259.

William Polite

The late Dr. William "Buggs" Polite and his sons Brandon and William Jr. The boys along with their sister Eboni Polite Armstrong are continuing their father's legacy by keeping his program Build and Rebuild alive.

> "You have to build the mind before you can rebuild the man."
>
> **DR. WILLIAM "BUGGS" POLITE**

Planting Seeds for Wichita: Abel Frederic and Promise on the Plains

By Tyjuan Davis
Wichita Reporter

Abel Frederic grew up in a Haitian home in South Florida where faith, service, and hard work were everyday lessons. "We didn't have much, but what we had, we shared," he said.

Those values guide him today as vice president of Community Impact at United Way of the Plains and as the creator of Promise on the Plains, a grant initiative that has become one of Wichita's most unique approaches to supporting grassroots nonprofits.

QUICK TAKEAWAYS

- Promise on the Plains gives $2,500–$10,000 low-barrier grants to small nonprofits in Wichita.
- The program has supported boxing gyms, farms, after-school centers, and youth mentoring groups.
- Creator Abel Frederic blends his Haitian roots, law training, and community leadership to strengthen Wichita.

Representatives from the 2024 United Way of the Plains Promise on the Plains grant recipients. That year, the awards totaled $85,000. Grant awardees were: The Center, Community Operations Recover Empowerment, The Gift of Chess, Hope Community Development Corporation, The Kansas African American Museum, LaFamilia Senior Community Center, Prairie Rose Wellbriefty Foundation, Progressive Community Outreach Program, Urban League of Kansas and the Wichita Indochinese Center. Abel Frederic, vice president for community impact at United Way, facilitated the funding selection process.

A Different Kind of United Way Program

Unlike traditional grantmaking, Promise on the Plains offers low-barrier grants — typically between $2,500 and $10,000 — to small, often overlooked organizations that are already embedded in neighborhoods. Applications open in April, close in May, and recipients are announced in June after review by a volunteer panel.

"It's not just about money," Frederic said. "We're empowering groups that are best positioned to reach people we might never be able to reach ourselves."

Since its launch, Promise on the Plains has fueled efforts ranging from boxing gyms that double as food pantries to farms bringing fresh produce into food deserts. Many of these grantees are one- or two-person operations — people wearing every hat, from executive director to janitor — who need capacity-building support as much as program dollars.

"Nonprofits are like businesses," Frederic says. "Their product is impact — changing lives. They need resources to grow, just like any other business."

Stories That Matter

The program has already reshaped lives and neighborhoods, with support for programs like:.

- CHD Boxing Club, run by Tracy Mason, uses the discipline of boxing to mentor youth while offering food and clothing to families in need.
- The Center, led by Bill and Michelle Van, expanded from summer programs to year-round services with Promise funding.
- Masters & Mentors Youth Enrichment, founded by Tony Ballard, uses chess to teach focus and resilience to justice-involved youth.
- Common Ground Growers and Producers, a family farm, chose community service over profit by delivering fresh produce to underserved neighborhoods.

"These are people with lived experience creating hope where it's needed most," Frederic says.

A Personal Journey of Equity

Frederic's commitment to equity is deeply personal. He remembers being bused to a wealthier school as a child: "I only kept up because someone filled the gaps for me. That's equity — filling gaps so people can compete."

That perspective shapes his leadership at United Way. He sees Promise on the Plains not only as funding but as recognition for people often overlooked. His mother's words remain a guiding principle: "The most powerful thing my mother ever told me was that she believed in me."

More Than a Job

Frederic's journey to Wichita has been unconventional. A graduate of Charlotte School of Law, he worked briefly in corrections before committing to nonprofit leadership. Along the way he cooked breakfast daily for his family, taught Brazilian jiu-jitsu at Fox Fitness, and carried his Haitian heritage with him through food and faith.

In Wichita, he has become known not only for his work at United Way, but also as a mentor, coach, and advocate for building a stronger, more connected community.

Looking Ahead

Promise on the Plains is still young, but Frederic says its success is already clear in the growth of organizations it supports. Watching The Center evolve from a small summer program to a multi-stream provider tells him the investment works.

"I will plant seeds for trees of which I will never feel the shade," he says. "Promise on the Plains is how we make sure those seeds take root."

Affordable Elegance

Haven Restaurant & Lounge opens with soul, style, and community in mind.

By Bonita Gooch
Editor-in-Chief

Wichita's Old Town has a new spot designed for good food, good music, and grown-folks vibes.

Haven Restaurant & Lounge — newly opened in the former Todd Brian's space in Old Town Square — was built to fill a gap many Black Wichitans talk about: a polished, welcoming place to gather without "special-occasion" prices.

The vision is unapologetically rooted in Black culture — R&B and neo-soul on rotation instead of loud rap, a mix of DJs, and an atmosphere that invites couples, coworkers, and friends to relax.

The Bayou Brunch Bowl gouda grits Topped with sautéed shrimp sausages, roasted tomatoes and Haven's signature cajun butter cream sauce.

Coowner Kasi Ross, (facing the camera) dining at Haven with family and his business partner, Isaiah Zhang and his family.

Food with a Touch of Soul

Haven's menu is southern-inspired with a soul-infused twist. Dishes like shrimp & grits and catfish with spaghetti share space with other comfort-driven favorites. You know it's a restaurant with soulful roots, with cornbread, sweet potatoes, grits and peach cobbler on the menu.

Owner Kasi Ross personally curated the menu, fine-tuning flavors and accents. He calls himself a foodie, but Haven isn't meant to be a chef-driven concept. Instead, it's about consistently great food that people will want to come back for week after week. Most entrées land in the $20 range — a deliberate choice to keep date nights and happy hours approachable.

The restaurant opened with what Ross calls a "test menu." Expect adjustments as feedback comes in: some dishes will be added, others may fade away. Diners are encouraged to share suggestions. Vegetarian and vegan options are already under consideration.

Happy Hour, Brunch & Late-Night Eats

Ross envisions Haven as more than a dinner spot. Happy hour will roll out on Wednesdays and Thursdays, tailored to young professionals. While the menu is still being finalized, expect discounted appetizers and a handful of drink specials.

On weekends, Haven becomes a brunch destination. Saturdays and Sundays from opening until 3 p.m., DJs set the mood with easygoing R&B while diners linger over mimosas, flights, and hearty plates.

Looking further ahead, Haven plans to become one of the few places in Old Town with a late-night dining option. Ross is still fine-tuning logistics, but the vision is to keep the kitchen open after hours for either dine-in or to-go orders. "Everybody loves late-night food," he said, "but it needs to be intentional."

The Look & Feel

Haven's atmosphere is as carefully curated as its menu. The owners inherited much of the existing restaurant equipment, which made for a smoother transition, but Ross insisted on upgrades that give Haven its signature feel.

- Fresh paint, a new bar top, backsplash, and modern lighting set the tone.
- Soft lighting creates a laid-back but intimate mood — equally right for date night or a relaxed evening with friends.
- Sconces on the walls and candelabra-style light fixtures at each table make the dining room glow once the sun sets.
- Every table is dressed with a cloth tablecloth, replaced after each guest, along with cloth napkins — an upscale touch rarely seen in mid-priced Wichita restaurants.
- Ross even hand-selected the plates, glasses, and silverware to fit the brand's sense of elegance.

It's an ambiance that blends upscale polish with easy comfort, reflecting Haven's three guiding principles: excellence, elegance, and for everyone.

Who's Behind Haven?

Though the restaurant is new, Ross is no stranger to business. A 27-year-old Wichita East High graduate, he earned both a bachelor's and master's degree in accounting from the University of Kansas before working at Ernst & Young in Atlanta.

When his grandmother became ill in 2022, he returned home to support family, and soon realized Wichita offered both affordability and opportunity. Within months, he left corporate life and turned to entrepreneurship full-time.

Since then, Ross has launched Whiz Kid Consulting, Brand New Day (a program supporting foster-care youth, operated with his mother), a sports-gaming venture, and a handful of rental properties. Haven, he admits, is his most ambitious project yet. His business partner, Iasiah Zhang, a longtime friend with family roots in entrepreneurship, brings additional business acumen and operational savvy.

Ross's accounting background informs Haven's day-to-day operations. He's meticulous about inventory, labor costs, and pricing, pitfalls that often trip up new restaurants. At the same time, his frequent travels inspire the kind of menus, cocktails, and ambiance he wants to introduce to Wichita.

A Gathering Place by Design

At its core, Haven is designed to be a safe, stylish home base for Wichita's Black community — a place to hear familiar music, enjoy good food, and feel welcome. But Ross also emphasizes that Haven is for everyone. "Anybody who walks in the door should feel appreciated," he said.

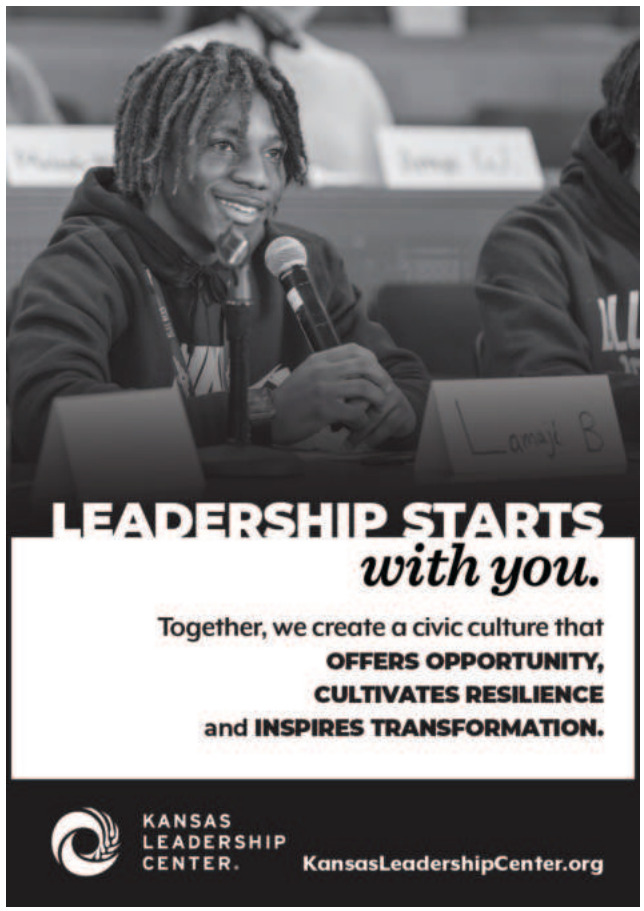
For Ross, Haven isn't just about food and cocktails — it's about creating the kind of space he longed for after moving back from Atlanta. Wichita, he believed, lacked a place where Black professionals, families, and couples could feel fully at home in an elegant yet approachable setting. Haven was built to be that place.

Cajun-spiced blackened catfish, paired with dirty rice and fried okra. $24

IF YOU GO

HAVEN RESTAURANT & LOUNGE
315 N. Mead, Wichita
Around the Old Town Square, near the Boulevard Theater

HOURS:
Wed.–Thu.: 11 a.m.–midnight
Fri.–Sat.: 11 a.m.–1 a.m.
Sun: 10 a.m.–10 p.m.
Brunch: Sat.–Sun., open–3 p.m.



KENNEDY, from Page **10** ↓

She later taught and coached at Coleman and Hamilton Middle Schools before becoming assistant principal and then principal at Gordon Parks Academy.

At Gordon Parks, Kennedy led with a mix of academic urgency and expansive vision. So after a decade as a principal -- a position she says is the toughest in the district -- she decided she was ready to retire, and admits, "I wanted to go out on top."

However, when the Director of Family and Community Engagement role opened, she saw a capstone that matched her calling. The transition has brought a different pace—"I even had time to make a lasagna," she laughs—but not a different purpose.

Whether it's washers and dryers on campus, a Saturday resource fair at the 50-yard line, or a parent finally getting a call back and a plan from the right district office, Kennedy's work is about meeting families where they are and walking with them toward where they want to be.

"Community" is in her title, but for Kennedy, it's also the method. Build trust. Share power. Solve real problems. And keep the doors—school doors, opportunity doors—open.

LaTonia Kennedy served as principal of Gordon Parks Academy in Wichita for 10 years. She's pictured here with state Sen. Oletha Faust-Goudeau and Gordon Parks students.

Historic photo of three inductees into the Kansas Sports Hall of Fame, former NFL player Larry Brown, Wichita and KU football and track standout and Clifford Wiley, KU and Olympic sprinter.

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St James Missionary Baptist Church Inc. is currently seeking the servant leader whom God is calling to serve as our next pastor. Please go to our new website and click on forms for further details:

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Deacon Billy Dempsey @ 316 734-7096
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FAME, from Page **16** ↓

J.C. Louderback was a three-sport standout at Cowley and Southwestern before a 36-year coaching career at Arkansas City High School, where his tennis teams won three state titles.

Mark Mangino, KU football coach from 2002–09, led the Jayhawks to the historic 2007 Orange Bowl win and was named national Coach of the Year.

Bobby Randall, a Kansas State baseball great and longtime coach, also logged five seasons with the Minnesota Twins.

Deb (Pihl) Torneden, a Kansas State track star and four-time All-American, continues to set records as a national masters running champion.

Jackson
MORTUARY
A Legacy of Service... Built upon more than 90 years of knowledge and community trust

Rrachelle Renee' Breckenridge, 58
July 20, 1967 - October 2, 2025
Service will be held at 10 am on Sat., Oct. 18 at New Hope Missionary Baptist Church, 1001 N. Ohio.

Delores Shanklin, 89
July 29, 1936 - October 1, 2025
Service will be held at 10 am on Fri., Oct. 17 at Jackson Mortuary Chapel, 1125 E. 13th.

Tyrone Carr, Sr., 49
June 11, 1976 - September 30, 2025
Service will be held at 2 pm on Sat., Oct. 25 at New Jerusalem Baptist Church, 1625 N Madison.

Harry Carlis Jr., 81
May 3, 1944 - September 29, 2025
Service was held on Oct. 11 at Jackson Mortuary Chapel.

Brentton Olice Walker, 39
November 9, 1985 - September 28, 2025
Service will be held at 10 am on Wed., Oct. 15 at New Hope Missionary Baptist Church, 1001 N. Ohio

Val Dunn, 71
September 15, 1954 - September 27, 2025
A memorial service will be scheduled at a later date.

Eddie Washington, 66
March 26, 1959 - September 25, 2025
Service will be held at 11 am on Thu., Oct. 16 at New Jerusalem Baptist Church, 1625 N Madison.

Lillie Lucille Witherspoon, 86
March 6, 1939 - September 23, 2025
Service was held on Oct. 9 at New Testament Non-Denominational Church

John Henry Herbert, 83
July 17, 1942 - September 20, 2025
Service will be held at 11 am on Tue., Oct. 14 at St. Mary Missionary Baptist, 1648 E. 17th.

POLITE, from Page **11** ↓

enhancing the **Build & Rebuild Education and Family Center,** located at 1751 N. Ash in Northeast Wichita, now a dynamic hub that captures their father's dream. It houses a **recording and podcast studio, a gaming and development lab, GED and diploma testing rooms, a fitness and T-shirt printing center, tutoring rooms,** and plans for a **community garden.** Each space sparks creativity, skill, and self-determination.

"Kids can learn trades, produce music, start businesses — it's everything Dad dreamed of," said Brandon.

This multifaceted hub allows Build & Rebuild to extend far beyond after-school tutoring. It's not just a safe place; it's a launchpad for purpose.

Partnerships That Strengthen the Mission

Build & Rebuild thrives on collaboration. The ministry partners with **Dad's Care 2**, a separate organization helping fathers reconnect with their children through healing and mentorship; **Books & Breakfast,** a monthly event offering free meals, fellowship, and reading for youth; and community efforts such as **Hope for the Hood, Save • Match • Grow, WSU Tech,** and **YouthBuild.**

Finley notes that the goal extends beyond justice reform to help students, fathers, and families grow into their fullest potential. Each alliance reflects the same principle Polite championed: lasting change takes a village — schools, churches, families, and mentors working together.

Proof in the Lives They Touch

Impact isn't measured in spreadsheets but in stories.

"When a kid gets out and the first thing he does is text me, 'I prayed tonight,' that's everything," Brandon said. "Another FaceTimed me from the gym to show his muscles and say 'resilience.' That's when you know it's working."

Finley recalled a similar encounter: "A young man stopped me at a gas station just to say he finished training and got a good job."

Moments like those remind the team why the work continues.

Faith in the Future

For the Polite family, ministry and education are inseparable. The spiritual core — the belief that transformation begins from within — remains their compass.

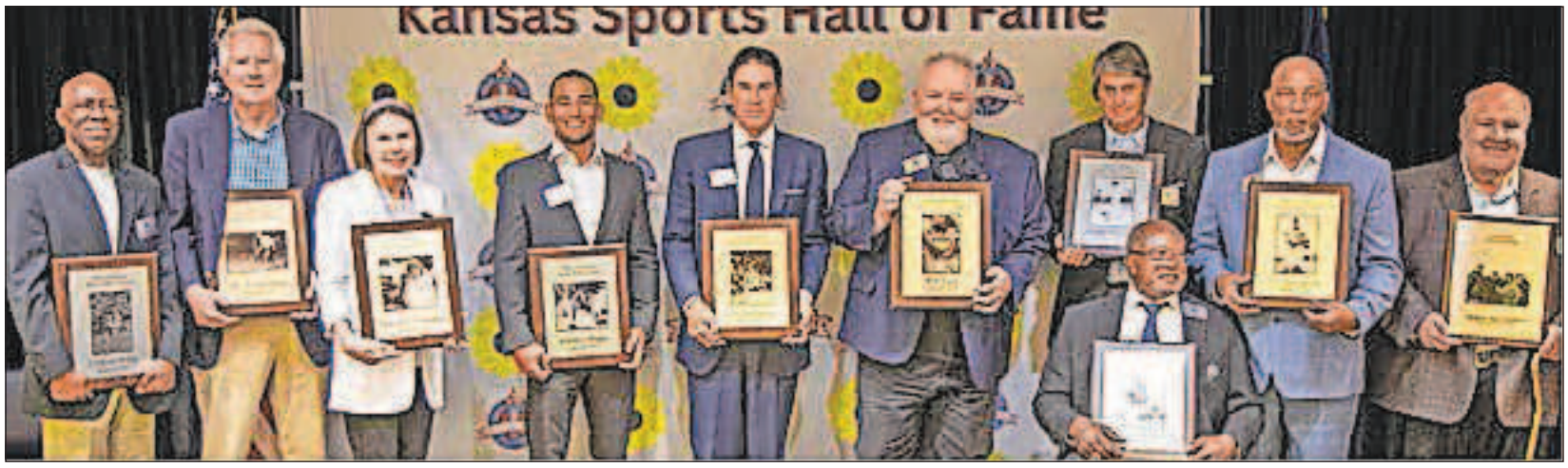
This fall, Build & Rebuild will serve as the **starting hub for Wichita's Million Man March commemoration,** uniting organizations such as Heroes Academy, Dad's Care 2, and Destination Innovation. The ministry also continues to host **Books & Breakfast** every second Saturday, offering food, fellowship, and inspiration for families across the city.

"The work will never stop," Brandon said. "Protect Your Mind, Build & Rebuild, School Halls Not Prison Walls — they'll live forever. Not just through us, but through the kids we reach."

And so, in a building once filled with preschoolers' laughter, a new generation now gathers — young minds protected, futures rebuilt — proof that Dr. William "Buggs" Polite's vision still breathes through every lesson, every prayer, every life renewed.

Build & Rebuild Educational Ministries is located at 1751 N. Ash in Wichita's historic northeast community. For more info or to get involved, visit BuildAndRebuild.org

The Build and Rebuild program is based in the old Head Start building at 1751 N. Ash in Northeast Wichita.



Members of the 2025 Class of the Kansas Sports Hall of Fame are (L-R) Clifford Wiley, J.C. Louderback, Deb (Pihl) Torneden, Kendric Maple, Tim Jankovich, Bob Lutz, Bobby Randle, Laverne Smith, Mark Mangino and (seated) Larry Brown.

Legends Shine in Kansas Sports Hall of Fame Inductions

By Bonita Gooch
Editor-in-Chief

Amazing athletes with strong Kansas ties were front and center as the Kansas Sports Hall of Fame welcomed its 2025 class in Topeka. This year, 10 new members were honored at raising the Hall's total to 349 inductees since its founding in 1961.

The spotlight fell on four names with deep roots to our community of readers — NFL running back Larry Brown, wrestler Kendric Maple, Wichita Southeast's Laverne Smith, and world-class sprinter Clifford Wiley.

Each carved out a career that connected Kansas to the national stage.

Larry Brown: From K-State to NFL MVP

Larry Brown's path to football glory began at Kansas State, where his hard-nosed running style caught the eye of the NFL. Drafted by Washington, Brown became one of the league's premier backs in the 1970s. He twice led the league in rushing and was named the NFL's Most Valuable Player in 1972. Despite playing with significant hearing loss, Brown earned four Pro Bowl selections and more than 5,000 career rushing yards — achievements that still inspire.

Kendric Maple: Wichita's Wrestling Standard

Kendric Maple grew up on Wichita's north side and starred at Wichita Heights High School, where he claimed back-to-back state wrestling championships in 2008 and 2009. His dominance continued at the University of Oklahoma, where he won the 2013 NCAA title at 141 pounds and added three Big 12 championships to his résumé. Maple finished with a sterling 127-25 record and later went on to win U.S. Open Freestyle national titles in 2017 and 2022. Now the associate head coach at the University of Missouri, Maple is helping guide the next wave of collegiate wrestling talent.

Laverne Smith: Southeast's Dual-Sport Phenom

Closer to home, Wichita Southeast's Laverne Smith made headlines in both football and track. At KU, he became one of the school's most explosive running backs, setting records for rushing yards, touchdowns, and 100-yard games. On the track, he claimed Big Eight sprint titles and still holds KU's 100-meter dash record. Drafted by the Pittsburgh Steelers in 1977, Smith's athletic versatility remains legendary among Jayhawk fans.

Clifford Wiley: Speed on the World Stage

Clifford Wiley left an indelible mark as a track star at the University of Kansas. A 13-time All-American, Wiley was part of KU's NCAA-winning 4x400-meter relay team in 1978. He also sprinted onto the world stage, setting a world record in the 4x100 relay at the 1977 IAAF World Cup and later winning the 400-meter title at the 1981 World Cup. A member of the 1980 U.S. Olympic Team, Wiley helped put Kansas sprinting on the global map.

Other Honorees

Bob Lutz, longtime Wichita Eagle sports columnist, spent 42 years chronicling Kansas sports. In 2013, he founded League 42, a youth baseball program in Northeast Wichita honoring Jackie Robinson. Today, more than 600 children play baseball each summer because of his vision.

Tim Jankovich, a Manhattan High and Kansas State basketball standout, later earned more than 300 wins as a college coach, including a 2017 AAC Coach of the Year season at SMU.

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