The Oklahoma Eagle

GO DIGITAL | MAY 12, 2023 - MAY 18, 2023 | $1.00

THE OK EAGLE.COM | "WE MAKE AMERICA GREAT, WHEN WE AID OUR PEOPLE" | SERVING GREATER TULSA SINCE 1921

WEEK
5,327
SINCE THE 1921 TULSA RACE MASSACRE

It's long overdue for the criminals who destroyed the Greenwood community in 1921 to be held accountable. Each week we remember a departed member of our community.

DIGITAL
THE OKEAGLE.COM

THE DIGITAL EDITION OF THIS WEEK'S NEWSPAPER IS AVAILABLE ONLINE AT **THEOKEAGLE.COM**, OUR NEW WEB DOMAIN. PLEASE VISIT US ONLINE AND ENJOY ALL PUBLISHED STORIES AT YOUR CONVENIENCE, AND CONSIDER SUPPORTING THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE WITH THE PURCHASE OF AN ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION.

NATION
DITCHING FAST FASHION
FOR THRIFTING B1

OKLAHOMA
TAKES STEPS TO ADDRESS *Childcare* SCARCITY

By Ari Fife, Oklahoma Watch

A BILL AIMED AT STREAMLINING local rules for in-home daycares was signed into law by Gov. Kevin Stitt this week. Freshman legislator Rep. Suzanne Schreiber, D-Tulsa, authored the bill requiring local governments to follow Department of Human Services

CHILDCARE SCARCITY *On* A2

NATION
BLACK TEENS *Are* SUFFERING *In Silence*

By Anissa Durham, Word In Black

TEENS SUFFERING IN SILENCE *On* B2

LOCAL & STATE
OK WOMAN: SEX OFFENDER Controlled My *Daughter's Family*

By Sean Murphy, Associated Press

SEX OFFENDER *On* A3

JAMES
KAVIN ROSS

By The Oklahoma Eagle

NORTH TULSA LOSES A FIERCE COMMUNITY ADVOCATE
June 1962 – May 2023

James Kavin Ross, a stalwart North Tulsa leader who documented the history, culture and life of Black Tulsa for a generation, died Monday, May 8. He was 60.

Ross was a self-styled historian and gifted videographer who used his skills at engaging people and storytelling in interviews of 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre survivors during the 1990s and early 2000s. He worked closely with the late Eddie Faye Gates, Black Tulsa's best-known historian, to ensure that the survivors' stories were captured and preserved. Their work has proven crucial to maintaining the integrity of the narrative of that dark but pivotal chapter in Tulsa's past.

Ross's missives about the shadow and legacy of the race massacre and other issues appeared in the Greenwood Tribune and other publications. He was a staff writer for the Oklahoma Eagle from 2000-2004. "Ever since I can remember, Kavin was taking every opportunity he could to educate people about the history of Black Tulsa," recalled Donna Ross, his sister, a beloved school teacher, in an interview.

Ubiquitous in the community

Ross understood that being part of Tulsa's Black community called on him to be present whenever possible. Over the years, he became a ubiquitous figure at funerals, meetings, conferences on Greenwood and just about everywhere else in North Tulsa. Stout and sometimes sharp tongued, Ross always showed up wearing his familiar warm smile and often lugging a video camera. He was a fierce advocate of Black Tulsa and an intricate part of the fabric that holds the community together.

In 2019, Tulsa Mayor GT Bynum appointed Ros Chair of the Citizen Oversight Committee for the city's search for burials from the massacre. The group, composed mostly of Black Tulsans, many of whom, including Ross, were descendants of survivors of the race massacre. That role threw Ross at the center of often tense debates about the mass graves over the past three years. In the tense

KAVIN ROSS *cont.* A6

MCCURTAIN PUBLISHER
REJECTS VIEWS OF THE COUNTY AS RACIALLY BIASED

Bruce Willingham, publisher of the McCurtain Gazette-News, batted back perceptions of McCurtain County as a part of Oklahoma that is hostile to Blacks and other minorities.

By John Neal

That public view of McCurtain emerged following an expose, widely published in Oklahoma and national media outlets in late April, in which McCurtain officials were caught in a recording threatening to kill reporters and to lynch and beat Blacks. In an interview with the Oklahoma Eagle, Willingham acknowledged that high-profile racially charged events occurred in the County in years past. But "things have changed," he said.

"I know there is still racism and racism in institutions," Willingham told the Eagle. "But we are not like that down here. We are a good Christian community." Willingham is originally from North Carolina. He moved to Oklahoma in the late 1970s and has been publisher of the Gazette News since 1988.

Craig Young, who is African American and mayor of Idabel, the McCurtain County Seat, called for the immediate resignation of the officials who made the racist comments. Many other public officials in Oklahoma, including Governor Kevin Stitt, have joined Young in demanding that the officials step down. Locals continue to hold public rallies and protests in Idabel.

MCCURTAIN COUNTY *cont.* A6

LOCAL & STATE
THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE **WINS Best Page Design & Earns Well-Deserved Honors** FROM GREAT PLAINS

TULSA – THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE , the state's oldest Black-owned media company and the last privately-owned business that owns property and continues to operate in Tulsa's famed Historic Greenwood District, won Best Page Design in the Great Plains Journalism Awards competition on May 5.

The Eagle competed with both daily and weekly newspapers in the competition. The newspaper narrowly missed out on begin named Newspaper of the Year, which went to the Omaha World-Herald.

The 14th annual competition, sponsored by Tulsa Press Club, honors newspaper, magazine, television and web journalism from eight states: Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma and South Dakota.

By The Oklahoma Eagle

THE EAGLE AWARD *On* A7

LOCAL & STATE
TEACHING CIVICS
WHAT IT'S LIKE TO TEACH CIVICS AMID POLITICAL POLARIZATION, INTENSE SCRUTINY. A8

NATION
LEARNING LOSS
WANT TO STOP LEARNING LOSS? SEND YOUR KID TO SUMMER CAMP B3

OPINION
BLACK FEMALE BATTALION
MARYLAND GOVERNOR WES MOORE SIGNED A BILL RECOGNIZING THE 6888TH BATTALION. A5

NATION
HONORING THE MISSING
WEARING RED, INDIGENOUS FAMILIES HONOR MISSING RELATIVES. B8

VOL. 102 NO. 19
THE OK EAGLE.COM
#THE OK EAGLE
#OKEAGLEPAPER

PUBLISHER'S PAGE
Leona Pearl Mitchell
Award-winning opera singer and Oklahoma Music Hall of Fame inductee. A4

AD SERVICES
Jobs & Classifieds
Discover career opportunities, classifieds and time-sensitive notifications. B6

CHURCH DIRECTORY
Faith In Tulsa
The Eagle Church Directory is your source for finding a place to worship. B5

8 10499 02044 7

OVERWHELMING GRIEF IN HENRYETTA, OK.
Law enforcement investigating what led to the killing of seven people in rural Oklahoma. **A3**

THEY'VE GOT MORE RIGHTS
The local response to McCurtain County officials' rhetoric of 'hit men" and "hangings". **A6**

OPTIONS ARE LIMITED

For Oklahoma Families Who Need Affordable Childcare In The Post-COVID-19 Era

JASMINE STEWART, top right, participates in play time March 13, 2023 at her home-based childcare Jus Kid'N Learning Academy in Tulsa. Also pictured are, from left, Tarleace Johnson, Chant'e Stewart, Lynnox Mickey and Kason Grey.
PHOTO **RIP STELL/FOR OKLAHOMA WATCH**

CHILDCARE SCARCITY

capacity limits instead of creating their own. Studies show 55% of Oklahomans live in areas where childcare is scarce.

States like California and Colorado have passed similar laws that define in-home childcares as residential property uses and ban local governments from creating rules for those childcares that don't apply to other residential properties.

Other towns, like Edmond, have moved to limit childcare capacities beyond what DHS requires. Schreiber said the bill was written with her hometown of Tulsa in mind. Its zoning code prohibits childcare homes with more than seven kids from operating in a neighborhood without an exception from a city board. The rule contradicts DHS regulations, which state that in-home childcares can serve up to 12 kids.

For Jasmine Stewart, who runs a childcare in North Tulsa, the passage of the bill means she's able to accomplish the longtime goal of expanding her facility. She cares for 10 kids and would have had to either downsize or request an exemption, which would mean paying a $500 fee that equals about two weeks of tuition for one student.

"(The law) means stability," Stewart said. "It means growth because I don't have to stress about possibly telling parents this is going to be their last year or 'We can't renew your contract.'"

Tulsa officials started the process of reconsidering local requirements, including childcare capacities, in November. But now that Schreiber's bill has passed, city of Tulsa planner Austin Chapman said they could opt to remove other local requirements too.

On May 17, the Tulsa Metropolitan Area Planning Commission is considering recommendations from the city Planning Office that the city enforce the same lot and building regulations for all homes, regardless of whether they house childcare. The office also recommends that the city remove the requirement that in-home childcare employees live in the home.

The Planning Commission will review the recommendations and submit them to the city council and mayor. The date of the meeting council will discuss the recommendations is to be determined.

(Editor's Note: Suzanne Schreiber is an Oklahoma Watch board member. Board members play no role in Oklahoma Watch's journalism.)

ARI FIFE is a Report for America corps member who covers race and equity issues for Oklahoma Watch. Contact her at (405) 517-2847 or afife@oklahomawatch.org. Follow her on Twitter at @arriifife

For Jasmine Stewart, who runs a childcare in North Tulsa, the passage of the bill means she's able to accomplish the longtime goal of expanding her facility.

PHOTO **ADOBE IMAGES**

TOP **ASHLEIGH WEBSTER** shows a photo of Ivy Webster and Tiffany Guess at her home in Henryetta, Okla., Tuesday, May 2, 2023. PHOTO **NATHAN J. FISH/THE OKLAHOMAN VIA AP.** BOTTOM home **PASTOR RYAN WELLS** hugs Nathan Brewer, the father of Brittany Brewer who was found dead, after a vigil in Henryetta, Okla., on Monday, May 1, 2023. Authorities searching a rural Oklahoma property for two missing teenagers discovered the bodies of seven people, including the suspected remains of the teens and a convicted sex offender who was sought along with them, the local sheriff said. PHOTO **NATHAN J. FISH/THE OKLAHOMAN VIA AP**

Overwhelming Grief

HENRYETTA, Okla. (AP) — As law enforcement officials went silent while investigating what led to the killing of seven people in rural Oklahoma, family members of those slain recalled the domineering nature of one of the dead, who was a registered sex offender.

By **Keaton Ross,** Oklahoma Watch

SEX OFFENDER *from* **A1**

Since announcing the bodies were found Monday, authorities have released scant information on who was dead, how they died and who killed them. But grieving relatives working to piece together the horror story that started with two teenagers being reported missing, said law enforcement told them all the victims were shot to death in slayings that have stunned the community of Henryetta.

Janette Mayo was the first to say publicly that her daughter and three teenage grandchildren were among the dead. Her daughter was married to Jesse McFadden, a sex offender who Okmulgee County Sheriff Eddy Rice said Monday had also been killed and linked to two other teenagers reported missing this week.

McFadden had been controlling, Mayo said, which had concerned her. But she said the family didn't learn about her son-in-law's criminal history until a few months ago.

"He lied to my daughter, and he convinced her it was all just a huge mistake," Mayo, of Westville, told The Associated Press. "He was very standoffish, generally very quiet, but he kept my daughter and the kids basically under lock and key. He had to know where they were at all times, which sent red flags up."

On Monday, Rice said the bodies were found on the property where McFadden lived near Henryetta, a town of about 6,000 about 90 miles (145 kilometers) east of Oklahoma City. The dead bodies included two teens who had been reported as missing and in danger — Ivy Webster, 14, and Brittany Brewer, 16 — and who were last seen with McFadden. Rice said the state medical examiner would have to confirm the victims' identities.

Mayo, 59, of Westville, Oklahoma, near the Arkansas border, said the sheriff's office notified her late Monday that the other four victims were her daughter, Holly Guess, 35, and her grandchildren, Rylee Elizabeth Allen, 17; Michael James Mayo, 15; and Tiffany Dore Guess, 13. Mayo said Tiffany was close friends with Ivy and Brittany, who were spending the weekend with the family.

While Rice declined to provide details of how they died, Mayo said the sheriff's office told her that her daughter and grandchildren were all found shot to death in various locations on McFadden's property.

Ivy's father, Justin Webster, said he filed a missing person report with the local sheriff's office when she didn't return home Sunday night after spending the weekend with McFadden, Guess and her children. Justin Webster said he thought the children went with McFadden to spend some time on a ranch where he was working near McAlester.

He said law enforcement officials also told him that all of the victims suffered gunshot wounds, that some had been lined up and were located across the property.

Webster echoed descriptions of McFadden as controlling and unusual, but said he had no idea about McFadden's criminal background.

"I would say he was weird," Webster said. "He was always getting into his kids' phones and reading all their snap messages and all that. It wasn't in a way of a concerned parent. It was more of keeping tabs on the kids."

The missing endangered person advisory issued early Monday said Webster and Brewer had been seen traveling with McFadden, who was on the state's sex offender registry. Oklahoma Department of Corrections prison records show he was convicted of first-degree rape in 2003 and released in October 2020.

McFadden had been scheduled to appear in court Monday for the start of a jury trial on charges of soliciting sexual conduct with a minor and possession of child pornography. Court records show he was communicating with a then-16-year-old girl using a contraband cellphone while he was incarcerated at a state prison near Muskogee. The teen's grandfather reported their communications to prison officials, according to an affidavit from a Department of Corrections investigator.

Webster hopes this whole ordeal leads to harsher criminal penalties for sex offenders, especially those who target children.

"The sexual (offender) registry doesn't work," he said. "I think there needs to be action taken. There needs to be repercussions, and someone needs to be held accountable. They let a monster out. They did this."

McFadden's attorney in that case has not responded to a phone message left Monday evening.

The grim discovery in Oklahoma keeps the U.S. on a torrid pace for mass killings in 2023 and could push the number of people slain in mass killings past 100 for the year, according to a database maintained by The Associated Press and USA Today in a partnership with Northeastern University.

In speaking to reporters Monday, Rice acknowledged another gruesome homicide case last fall in Oklmulgee County. The bodies of four men were found Oct. 14 in the Deep Fork River in Okmulgee, a small town about 15 miles (24 kilometers) north of Henryetta. Joseph Kennedy, 68, has been charged with four counts of first-degree murder.

"We've had our share of troubles and woes, but this one is pretty bad," the sheriff said.

Lisa Thomas, who runs Bear Bottom Antiques on Main Street in downtown Henryetta, said the killings sent a shock wave through the tight-knit community.

"It is truly like a Mayberry here," she said as she arranged sunflowers in a barrel outside her shop. "All the people that come into my shop are just wonderful. We are just in shock, absolute shock."

Brittany Brewer's father told KOTV in Tulsa that one of the bodies discovered was his daughter.

"Brittany was an outgoing person. She was actually selected to be Miss Henryetta ... coming up in July for this Miss National Miss pageant in Tulsa. And now she ain't gonna make it because she's dead. She's gone," Nathan Brewer said.

At a Monday night vigil, Brewer told hundreds of people: "It's just a parent's worst nightmare, and I'm living it."

He said his daughter had aspired to be a teacher or a veterinarian.

"I am just lost," he said.

Ivy Webster's mother, Ashleigh, described her daughter as a great kid who loved animals.

"She loved softball. She loved people, animals. She was just a genuine good person. She really was," Ashleigh Webster said.

Mayo described her daughter, Holly Guess, as a doting parent.

"She was a fantastic mother. She loved her children beyond belief. She was overprotective," Mayo said. "She was supportive if they wanted to do something. She'd go out 100%."

Granddaughter Rylee Allen "had a talent with a paint brush," she said. "Rylee wanted to be an artist and wanted to be a doctor so she could help people."

Michael Mayo ran track and cross-country, and when he wanted to play football, his mother went out and bought the family T-shirts and sweatshirts to support the team, Mayo said. Tiffany Guess also ran cross-country, she performed in the choir and had just tried out for the cheerleading squad.

"She was the sweetest, most loving girl you'd ever met," Mayo said. "We called her 'Tiffasaurus' because when she'd get mad at you, she'd growl."

Henryetta Public Schools said the community is grieving the loss of several students.

"Our hearts are hurting, and we have considered what would be best for our students in the coming days," the district said in a message posted online.

Leona Pearl Mitchell: Opera Singer

By **Kitty Pittman,** The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture

Opera singer Leona Mitchell was born October 13, 1949, in Enid, Oklahoma, to Rev. Hulon and Pearl Olive Leatherman Mitchell.

Tenth of fifteen children, Leona Mitchell began her musical journey by singing in her father's church choir. She received a scholarship from Oklahoma City University, in 1971 earning a bachelor's degree in music. Her alma mater later conferred upon her an honorary doctorate in music.

Mitchell debuted with the San Francisco Spring Opera Theater in 1972 and received an Opera America grant, which allowed her to study with Ernest St. John Metz in Los Angeles. On December 15, 1975, she made her Metropolitan Opera debut as Micaela in Bizet's Carmen, the same role she had sung at her debut. This marked the beginning of her many performances in opera houses all over the world, including Geneva, Paris, Madrid, and Sydney. Mitchell performed for eighteen consecutive seasons at the Metropolitan, a testament to her voice and professionalism.

Well known for her performances in operas by Puccini and Verdi, she also sang Bess in the London Records recording of the George Gershwin classic Porgy and Bess, with the Cleveland Orchestra. She has made television as well as film appearances. Her first solo operatic album was Presenting Leona Mitchell with Kurt Herbert Adler: An Operatic Partnership, recorded in 1979.

Mitchell received numerous Oklahoma awards, including induction into the Oklahoma Music Hall of Fame in 2001 and the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 2004. She was given an Outstanding Oklahoman citation in 1975 and was named "Ambassadress of Enid" that same year. She was also honored by a joint session of the Oklahoma Legislature in 1985. She has performed for two presidents and at the inauguration of Charles Bradford Henry as governor of Oklahoma in 2003. She married Elmer Bush III and had one son, Elmer Bush IV. At the end of the twentieth century she resided in Houston, Texas.

THE OKLAHOMA HISTORICAL SOCIETY is an agency of the government of Oklahoma dedicated to promotion and preservation of Oklahoma's history and its people by collecting, interpreting, and disseminating knowledge and artifacts of Oklahoma.

LEONA MITCHELL, 2012.201.B0399.0254, photo by J. Miller, Oklahoma Publishing Company Photography Collection, OHS.

Featured Last Week

Ryan Walters, Teachers unions are "Terrorists Organizations."

Relief Program Ends, Oklahomans Return to Food Insecurity

Hannah Diggs Atkins: Librarian & Legislator

The Oklahoma Eagle

Founded in 1921

James O. Goodwin
Publisher 1980-Present
Robert K. Goodwin
Publisher 1972-1980
Edward L. Goodwin, Jr.
Co-Publisher 1980-2014
Edward L. Goodwin, Sr.
Publisher 1936-1972
Theodore B. Baughman
Publisher 1921-1936

Business

M. David Goodwin
Principal
Ross D. Johnson
Principal
David W. Cole
General Council
Marsh Media
Advertising

News

Gary Lee
Managing Editor
Ray Pearcey
Sr. Contributor
Nkem Ike
Contributor
Russell LaCour
Contributor
Victor Luckerson
Contributor
John Neal
Contributor

Photography

Cory Young
Photographer

Print

Sam Levrault
Production Director

Circulation

Kirstein Lynn
Subscription Manager

Digital

Web
TheOKEagle.com
Facebook
TheOKEagle
Twitter
OKEaglePaper

Contact

Letters to the Editor
editor@theokeagle.com
Advertise
advertise@theokeagle.com
Circulation
publishers@theokeagle.com
Subscribe
theokeagle.com/subscribe

The Oklahoma Eagle | Founded in 1921 | Vol. CII No. 19

THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE is published weekly on Fridays by The Oklahoma Eagle, L.L.C., P.O. Box 3267, Tulsa, OK 74101. General office is 624 E. Archer St., Tulsa, OK 74120. Periodical Postage (WSPS 406-580) is paid at Tulsa, OK. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to the above address. Delivery subscription rates (Continental United States, Hawaii, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands). All subscriptions may include Premium Edition issues throughout the year.
Mail Subscriber Rates: Single copy $1 | Yearly $52 | 2 Years $100

Delivery
For questions about deliver, billing and our membership program, please contact us at +1 (918) 582-7124, ext. 241.

Submissions
Submitted content may be edited for space, clarity and for considerations of liability. All submissions become the sole property of The Oklahoma Eagle, which reserves the right to run all or part of any submissions due to timeliness or newsworthiness.

Letters to the Editor
Want to write a letter to be published in the paper and online? Email us online to submit.

Advertising
For print and online advertising information, go to theokeagle.com/media-kit/ or call . +1 (918) 582-7124.

The Newsroom
Know something important we should cover? Send an inquiry to theokeagle.com/subscribe.

(LEFT) **MEMBERS OF THE 6888TH CENTRAL POSTAL DIRECTORY BATTALION** take part in a parade ceremony in honor of Joan d'Arc at the marketplace where she was burned at the stake. PHOTO **NATIONAL ARCHIVES AT COLLEGE PARK, PUBLIC DOMAIN, VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS**

(BOTTOM) **SECOND LIEUTENANT FREDA LE BEAU** serving Major Charity Adams a soda at the opening of the battalion's snack bar in Rouen, France. I. PHOTO **IMAGE VIA UNITED STATES ARMY SIGNAL CORPS, PUBLIC DOMAIN, VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS**

A BLACK FEMALE WWII BATTALION FINALLY GETS ITS DUE

By Frances Murphy (Toni) Draper, Word In Black

Maryland Governor Wes Moore signed a bill recognizing the 6888th Battalion — Black women who served their country when their country did not serve them.

The month of May has many celebrations — there's May Day, Cinco de Mayo, Mother's Day, World Press Freedom Day, and even African World Heritage Day, to name a few. May is also Arthritis Awareness Month, Better Sleep Month, Mental Health Awareness Month, National Walking Month, Women's Health Care Month, and Military Appreciation Month.

And then there's Memorial Day — a day set aside to honor and mourn the U.S. military personnel who died while serving in the Armed Forces.

On Memorial Day, flags are flown. Parades are planned. Cemeteries are visited. And military personnel are remembered and honored.

Yet, outside of the Tuskegee Airmen, there is little widespread recognition of Black Americans who served in this country's military — even though more than one million African American men and women served in every branch of the U.S. armed forces during World War II.

Until recently, one of the least recognized groups of Blacks in the armed forces was the 6888th Central Postal Directory. However, on May 3, 2023, Governor Wes Moore — the only sitting Black governor in the United States — signed the 6888th Bill, which stipulates that "the Maryland governor annually shall proclaim March 9 as 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion Day."

The 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion was an all-Black and Hispanic, all-female battalion that served during World War II. Despite their important role in sorting and delivering mail to American troops in Europe, the battalion's contribution to the war effort was largely unknown to the public for many years.

There are several reasons why the 6888th Battalion remained relatively unknown. One reason is that their work was not seen as glamorous or exciting compared to combat roles, and therefore their contributions were often overlooked or minimized.

More importantly, because the battalion was made up primarily of Black women, their achievements were often dismissed or ignored due to systemic racism and sexism. And the 6888th Battalion's work was often shrouded in secrecy, as their mission involved handling sensitive and confidential mail for American troops.

As a result, their work was not widely publicized, and the battalion was often moved from place to place without much fanfare or recognition.

It was not until many years after the war that the contributions of the 6888th Battalion began to be recognized and celebrated.

In recent years, there has been increased awareness of the battalion's achievements, and efforts have been made to honor their service and ensure that their contributions to the war effort are not forgotten.

"The women of the 6888th were discouraged when they discovered warehouses crammed from floor to ceiling with mail and packages that had not been delivered for at least two years," Kevin M. Hymel wrote for the Army Historical Foundation. "Rats the size of cats had broken into some of the Christmas care packages for front line soldiers and eaten their contents. The women went to work, organizing a system that would break the bottleneck of undelivered mail."

Hymel went on to say that "Work conditions were less than ideal. The women pitched mail in damp, poorly lit warehouses without heat. The windows were all painted over for blackout conditions. To battle the cold, some women resorted to wearing ski pants, field jackets, fatigues, or anything else to keep warm. They worked eight-hour rotating shifts, seven days a week. The job, which was supposed to take them six months, was completed in only three."

Their motto was "No mail, low morale." They focused on getting mail to soldiers and raising their morale.

I could go on and on about the 6888th and their amazing service to this country, especially during a time when Black women were marginalized and ignored.

I could spend hours writing about these 855 women who were stationed in Europe working three 24-hour shifts, seven days a week, to sort 18 million letters addressed to U.S. troops scattered across Europe during World War II.

I could write about the three 6888th members who died there and were buried in Normandy in coffins made by French prisoners.

I could write about their commanders Major Charity Adams (the first Black woman to be an officer in the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps — later called WACS), Captains Mary F. Kearney and Bernice G. Henderson.

I could revere the name of my aunt, PFC Vashti Murphy Matthews, who was a member of the 6888th — although we never heard her talk about her time in the Army.

And I could certainly point out that if it weren't for the AFRO's extensive coverage (1945-1946) of these brave soldiers, the names and hometowns of many would not be known today.

And, due to the tireless efforts over the past five years of Col. (U.S. Army ret.) Edna Cummings and others like Master Sergeant (ret.) Elizabeth Anne Helm-Frazier, more people are learning about this brave, dedicated, pioneering battalion. Col. Cummings is an amazing community servant and role model extraordinaire. She looks at her quest to highlight the 6888th as "the right thing to do."

Cummings recently said:

In 2018, Liz (Master Sergeant Helm-Frazier) and I began a journey to raise funds for the 6888th Monument at Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas, to honor these unsung WWII Sheroes. Little did we know that a monument would launch a movement of international recognitions, an award-winning documentary, a Blue Plaque at the King Edward's School in Birmingham, England, a Congressional Gold Medal(2022), a post office renaming in Buffalo, New York, an April 2023 military base renaming at Ft. Lee, Virginia (after LTG Arthur Gregg and the 6888th's Major Charity Adams), a Broadway-bound musical by Executive Producer Blair Underwood, a Netflix movie, and many other state and local proclamations. I am grateful to be a part of sharing the Six Triple Eight's history with the world.

In addition, Cummings noted that "Each year, March 9 will remind us of the selfless service of these Black women who served their country, when their country did not serve them."

And, Col. Edna Cummings, we are grateful to you, MSG Helm-Frazier, and so many other outstanding Black female leaders who have served this country well and continue to serve. You are role models extraordinaire, as are the Black women who serve today in all branches of the armed services. Kudos to you for staying on the battlefield!

We are looking forward to celebrating 6888th Day in Maryland on March 9, 2024, and every year thereafter. And, who knows, by then, there may be other 6888th days throughout the nation!

A TREMENDOUS Figure In Our Community

KAVIN ROSS *from* A1

discussions that ensued, Ross positioned himself as a judicious mediator. He was always diligent about exploring the possible sites of Mass graves, including Oaklawn Cemetery, Booker T. Washington cemetery in South Tulsa and other possible spots.

"He was our spirit and booster in the Tulsa Race Massacre Investigation," said Forensic anthropologist Phoebe Stubblefield, part of the physical investigation committee for the mass graves. "I miss him greatly."

"As the Chair of the Public Oversight Committee involved in our search, Kavin was involved every step of the way — not just in helping to make decisions but out at the site, helping the archaeologists and forensic anthropologists with anything at all that they needed to do their work. Whether they needed a historical document or a bottle of water, Kavin made sure they had it," Bynum said in a statement.

Member of beloved Tulsa family

Ross was part of a prominent North Tulsa family. His father, Don Ross, was a longtime Oklahoma state representative and popular columnist at the Oklahoma Eagle. His mother, Diane Ross died in February 2023. Donna Ross, his sister, was named Tulsa Teacher of the year in 2021. Ed Ross, his brother, is also a well-known retired business executive who serves on the board of the Greenwood Cultural Center. On Monday, May 15, KBOB radio station owner Bobby Eaton hosted an hour-long broadcast in which members of the Ross family shared warm memories of Kavin.

Ross suffered a heart condition and other health challenges. He had been riding his bike in North Tulsa one Friday in late April when he collapsed. His brother Ed later reported he had been stricken with a heart attack. Rushed to the hospital following the incident, his status continued to decline until he passed on May 8.

Ross grew up in North Tulsa and Gary, Indiana. He is a 1980 graduate of Booker T. Washington high school.

Tributes to Ross poured in across social media from across Tulsa.

Gives new life to the dead

"His dedication to the preservation and promotion of Greenwood and Tulsa's African American community and heritage was tremendous," The board of the Greenwood Culture said in a written tribute. He was tireless in his advocacy writing speaking and photography and activism."

Teresa Miller, a well-known Tulsa writer who founded the Oklahoma Center for Poets and Writers shared a recollection of Kavin. "One evening when I was introducing Ernestine Dillard to sing, we realized the piano was locked and had to send out for a locksmith, who disrupted the whole event my marching down the aisle with bolt cutters. But there was Kavin with his camera, catching it all on video, engaging the audience, and transforming what could have been an incredibly awkward transition into a cause for celebration.

Even after Kavin's career took him in a new direction, I knew I could count on him."

"He was a tremendous figure in our community," said Oklahoma Eagle Publisher James O. Goodwin. "He had so many gifts. Perhaps foremost among them was his ability as a documentarian to give new life to the dead. He honored the lives and stories of our ancestors."

"Given the breadth and depth of his knowledge about Greenwood and North Tulsa history, I don't know anyone who can replace him," said radio station owner and musician Bobby Eaton. "He will be truly missed in our community."

Kavin Ross's funeral will be held at 11 am on May 29 at the Greenwood Cultural Center.

JAMES KAVIN ROSS, Oklahoma icon. PHOTO **FACEBOOK**

"HE HAD SO MANY GIFTS. PERHAPS FOREMOST AMONG THEM WAS HIS ABILITY AS A DOCUMENTARIAN TO GIVE NEW LIFE TO THE DEAD. HE HONORED THE LIVES AND STORIES OF OUR ANCESTORS."

JAMES O. GOODWIN, Publisher, The Oklahoma Eagle

"They've Got More Rights **THAN WE GOT."**

MCCURTAIN COUNTY *from* A1

Willingham stressed that the protests are peaceful and respectful. Since the incident, locals are holding more open, honest discussions about race, Willingham said.

But the officials who made the remarks, including McCurtain County Sheriff Kevin Clardy, County Commissioner Mark Jennings, and Alicia Manning, a county sheriff employee, have refused to step down. Only Mark Jennings, who had served on the McCurtain County Board of Commissioners since January 2021, has resigned in the uproar over the incident.

McCurtain County is located in Southeastern Oklahoma. The three-hour audio recording was made public by the McCurtain Gazette-News, revealing the conversation discussed slaying reporters and lynching Blacks. Bruce Willingham left the recording device on though officials told him the public meeting was over. He said he suspected the group would continue conducting public business violating the Oklahoma Open Meeting Act. The Gazette released the recording on April 20th, following their reporting on the conversation. Calls for the officials' resignations and further investigations immediately followed.

The recorded conversation followed a March 6th McCurtain County Commission open meeting. The Gazette identified the parties who participated in the conversation as County Commissioner Mark Jennings, County Sheriff Kevin, and two sheriff's employees. The laughter-filled, boisterous conversation was apparently sparked by a series of critical articles written by the Gazette about the actions of the sheriff's office and other McCurtain County officials. It also follows a civil lawsuit filed by the Gazette against the County for retaliation and other activities against the newspaper and its reporters. Bruce Willingham told the Eagle, "These people must be called out." Willingham has reported that he has received death threats since the publication of the article. The family has taken steps to enhance their security, he told members of the Oklahoma Media Center in a group interview.

Conversation excerpts

A few excerpts of the recording provided by the Gazette follow. The Gazette has identified speakers. Following what was supposed to be the end of the formal meeting, the group left behind turned their attention to Willingham and his son Chris, a reporter for the Gazette:

Commissioner: "I've known two or three hit men who are very quiet guys and would have no f…… mercy." "I know where two deep holes are if you ever need them."

Sherriff: "I've got an excavator."

Commissioner: "Well, these are already pre-dug."

The conversation shifts to Blacks

Commissioner: "I'm going to tell you something. If it was back in the day when [name redacted by the Eagle] would take a Black guy and whoop their ass and throw them in a cell, I'd run for f…… sheriff."

Sheriff: "Yeah, well, it's not like that no more."

Commissioner: "I know. Take them down to Mud Creek and hang them with a rope. But you can't do that anymore. They've got more rights than we got."

Little Dixie

The officials were meeting in the courthouse in Idabel. According to census information, the county's Black population is eight percent. McCurtain County and a small cluster of other counties in this southeastern part of Oklahoma have long been dubbed "Little Dixie." This is because of "its close social, cultural, and above all, political connections to the American South," according to the Oklahoma Historical Society's Encyclopedia.

In 1980, a series of racial incidents occurred that came to be called the Idabel Riot. Henry Lee Jackson, a Black man, was found shot dead in January of that year in the parking lot of a whites-only bar. Just days following, the Washington Post reported "150 hastily assigned officers patrolled the streets," and there were "subsequent clashes between police and nearly 200" Black people." Several businesses were burned down, and two people were left dead. No one was ever convicted of Mr. Jackson's murder. He was fifteen years old.

Still, Bruce Willingham insists that these incidents do not represent the racial atmosphere in the county.

JOHN NEAL is a former resident of Sand Springs. He is well versed in urban renewal, its uses and abuse, as a former city manager in Oklahoma and departmental consultant for the city of El Paso, Texas. In 2008, he was that city's planning pirector when the city won multiple awards for its planning accomplishments. He is now retired and resides in Austin, Texas.

MEDIA EXCELLENCE

THE EAGLE AWARD *from* **A1**

Entries were judged by award-winning professional journalists from across the country. Winners and finalists were announced at a luncheon, hosted by The Mayo Hotel, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

The Eagle competed with both daily and weekly newspapers in the competition. The newspaper narrowly missed being named Newspaper of the Year, which went to the Omaha World-Herald.

"We are humbled by the recognition our staff received for the important journalism they accomplished in 2022," said owner and publisher James O. Goodwin. "We know our audience appreciates our role. To be recognized by your peers reinforces that we are producing quality and impactful journalism that continues to make a difference.," he added.

Goodwin, a 2022 Great Plains Journalism Hall of Fame inductee, credited The Eagle's leadership with assembling a team journalists, creatives, production and support talent to strengthen the media company's print legacy and digital growth.

Gary Lee, a native Tulsan, former Washington Post bureau chief, veteran journalist and author, has served as The Eagle's managing editor since 2021, offering, "These awards are a tribute to the consistently brilliant work of our team at the Eagle."

M. David Goodwin, also a Tulsa son, fourth-generation journalist, and long-serving national news media editor, has guided The Eagle's journalists along a path that now produces narratives that engender such praise and recognition by state and regional organizations.

Goodwin also noted Ross Johnson's roles and contributions, The Eagle's principal executive and creative director who has led the print and digital brand direction since 2021. Great Plains judges echoed Goodwin's sentiments, sharing, "The consistency in design and clean organization of this entry stood out," and "The combination of smart art direction and bold display on each page demonstrates what we should be endorsing, industry-wide, as visual journalists."

Lee earned a position of finalist for Writer of the Year. His work, a year-long series of three investigative projects produced, explored and revealed the mental health challenges faced by Tulsa's Black community; how the COVID-19 pandemic and remote learning negatively impacted the majority of Black and Brown children in Tulsa Public Schools; and the rich narratives of the Historic Greenwood District's residents, entrepreneurs, faithful, creative, civic engaged and families.

"Gary Lee broke stories that not only were critical to his core Black readership, but the community as a whole," the judges wrote.

Nicholas Phillips of St. Louis Magazine was named Writer of the Year.

Contributing writer John Neal earned a position of finalist for Review Columnist of the Year for his book reviews that critiqued the works of Black and white authors who published in 2022. "(John Neal had a) beautiful way of putting the book reviews together," the judges wrote. "The writing is balanced and relevant." Evan Jarvis of the Oklahoma Gazette won the award.

The Eagle, which marked 2022 as its centennial anniversary, was cited as one of the region's top newspapers. "Really impressive, especially for a weekly paper," the judges noted. "Great variety of stories, including the series on mental health and the spotlight on Black caterers. The use of illustration over photography on display pages is absolutely striking, a very inspired choice. Also, excellent use of student journalists with Etan Thomas story."

The Tulsa World Magazine was named Great Plains Magazine of the Year

The Arkansas Democrat-Gazette won Best Website in the Great Plains Awards journalism contest.

Other winners were:

- Great Plains Newspaper Photographer of the Year: Matt Gade, Rapid City Journal
- Great Plains Magazine Writer of the Year: Nicholas Phillips, St. Louis Magazine
- Great Plains Magazine Photographer of the Year: Shane Bevel, who entered pieces from a variety of regional publications.

Hall Of Fame Honorees

Five longtime journalists were inducted into the Great Plains Journalism Hall of Fame.

This year's class includes:

- Clytie Bunyan, Managing Editor for Diversity & Inclusion, Community Engagement & Opinion at The Oklahoman
- Becky Dixon, Owner and President of AyerPlay and former host of ABC's "Wide World of Sports"
- Ed Kelley, Dean of the Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Oklahoma
- Robert E. Lorton Jr., former owner and publisher of the Tulsa World
- Robert E. Lorton III, founder and publisher of the Frontier and former publisher of the Tulsa World

A complete list of honorees can be found at tulsapressclub.org.

The Arkansas Democrat-Gazette won Best Website in the Great Plains Awards journalism contest Friday.

The Omaha World-Herald staff took home Great Plains Best Newspaper of the Year honors, and Tulsa World Magazine was named Great Plains Magazine of the Year.

Two Democrat-Gazette staff members picked up individual awards. Columnist Philip Martin won the Entertainment Feature with "Jerry Lee Lewis" and photographer Thomas Metthe won General News Photography with "Davis Trial."

Top individual awards went to:

- Great Plains Writer of the Year: Jesse Bogan, St. Louis Post-Dispatch
- Great Plains Newspaper Photographer of the Year: Matt Gade, Rapid City Journal
- Great Plains Magazine Writer of the Year: Nicholas Phillips, St. Louis Magazine
- Great Plains Magazine Photographer of the Year: Shane Bevel, who entered pieces from a variety of regional publications.

A complete list of honorees can be found at tulsapressclub.org.

SIR'GREGORY COX-BATTLES, an eighth grader at F.D. Moon Middle School in Oklahoma City, reads to his classmates on April 19, 2023, during a social studies class that is testing a new curriculum built on encouraging students to engage in civil discourse and celebrate American ideals while also examining darker chapters of history. PHOTO **WHITNEY BRYEN/OKLAHOMA WATCH**

ICIVICS STARTED BY CREATING Digital Games With Themes Like Constitutional Rights

By **Jennifer Palmer,** Oklahoma Watch

TEACHING CIVICS' *from* **A1**

The curriculum was customized to align with Oklahoma's standards, but no changes were needed based on the law, which specifically protects teachers' ability to teach concepts laid out in the state standards.

Chatter filled Beatrice Mitchell's 8th grade social studies class on a recent afternoon. "Two more minutes before we start presenting," Mitchell announced.

At each table, students took a quick vote to decide who would represent them. A girl with long red and black braids was up first. Zaniyah Williams read her group's answer about Nat Turner, who in 1831 led the only effective slave rebellion in U.S. history.

"It says he's a preacher, but he's going around killing people. It doesn't sit right," she said.

Mitchell asked her to elaborate. How does that make you feel? Was he justified?

Another student took a turn. "I'm in the middle," he said. "Yes, he killed a lot of people. But slave masters also killed people and made people suffer."

The class at F.D. Moon Middle School in Oklahoma City is part of a pilot for a social studies curriculum built on encouraging students to engage in civil discourse and celebrate American ideals while also examining darker chapters of history.

Many of those weighty topics are underscored by race. Slavery. The Holocaust. The Tulsa Race Massacre.

Overshadowing that teaching today is extreme political polarization and an intense scrutiny of teachers. Oklahoma's one of at least 36 states that prohibits certain classroom discussions on race or gender, including what are considered "divisive concepts."

Oklahoma's law, House Bill 1775, passed in 2021, comes with stiff penalties. The state could downgrade school districts' accreditation and strip educators of their teaching credentials. It's part of a national effort by some conservative activists to prevent schools from teaching what's considered "critical race theory," an academic framework that examines how policies and laws uphold systemic racism.

But at the same time, there's an urgent push for more and better civics education. Many adults lack foundational knowledge in American history and government and aren't civically engaged.

The program Mitchell's class is piloting aims to be a solution. It was created by iCivics, an organization founded by retired U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, who was alarmed by Americans' lack of understanding in how the country's constitutional democracy is supposed to work.

iCivics started by creating digital games with themes like constitutional rights and the branches of government that are used by millions of students each year.

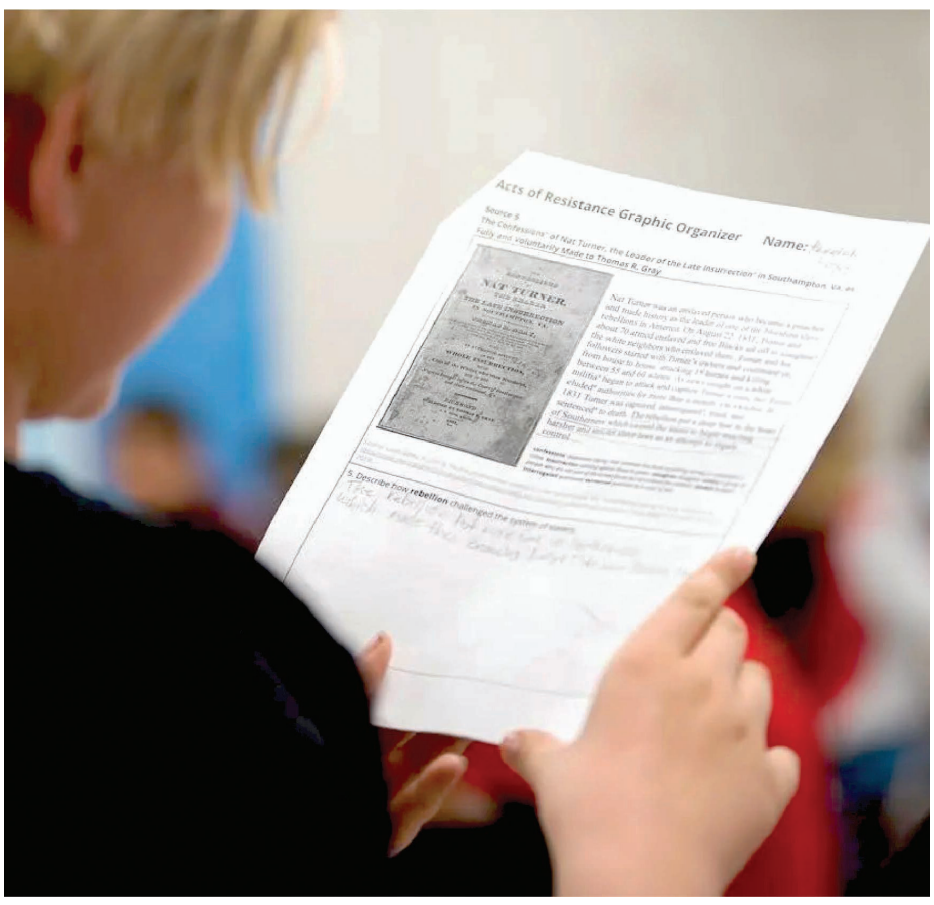
The organization developed its U.S. History core curriculum based on the Roadmap to Educating for American Democracy, a joint project with iCivics, Harvard, Tufts and Arizona State universities.

Oklahoma City Public Schools is one of three districts piloting the curriculum; the others are in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and Jefferson County, Colorado.

Mitchell, who's been teaching 13 years, is a big fan.

Students are retaining the material and taking ownership of their learning, she said.

"Up until this point (in their schooling), they're being told what to think, what to do," Mitchell said. "It blows their mind when I say 'what do you think ?'"



AN EIGHTH GRADER AT F.D. MOON MIDDLE SCHOOL in Oklahoma City reads from a worksheet during a social studies class that is testing a new curriculum built on encouraging students to engage in civil discourse. PHOTO **WHITNEY BRYEN/OKLAHOMA WATCH**

Mitchell said she used to imitate voices of historical characters like George Washington to keep her 13 and 14 year old students engaged. This content is so rich, she hasn't had to do that this year. "It's not the bland history most are used to," she said.

Though it's only the first year, there are signs the pilot is working. All of Mitchell's 8th grade students passed the U.S. naturalization test, a new graduation requirement starting this school year.

Across the district, 68% of 8th graders passed (students can take the quiz each year starting in 8th grade.)

And a recent survey found just 1 in 3 adults can pass the exam, even though 40 percent said U.S. history was their favorite subject in school. Oklahoma's passing rate was even lower at 1 in 4 adults.

A majority of adults across the political spectrum agree students need a more robust social studies education. Scores released Wednesday show U.S. 8th graders' knowledge of history and civics dropped significantly between 2018 and 2022, according to the Nation's Report Card.

But what gets taught, and how, and which texts are used, continues to be a significant source of disagreement and polarization.

iCivics has not avoided that controversy. While the organization is committed to nonpartisanship, it does uphold moral imperatives like racial justice, its director, Louise Dubé, said in an interview.

And its mission to provide equitable access to civics education has, at times, drawn criticism from conservatives. Equity is the E in DEI, another target of politicians who say education has gone too "woke."

The Oklahoma Board of Education last week requested a special report of all school districts regarding spending on diversity, equity and inclusion programs at the request of State Superintendent Ryan Walters. Walters, a former history teacher, claimed such programs are "Marxist at its core."

It's unknown whether this program would fall under DEI spending.

The goal of iCivics is to ensure every student has access to high-quality history and civics education by training teachers to feel confident using inquiry-based learning, which is essentially guiding students to use critical thinking by asking the right questions.

"We're not making a curriculum or a program for kids in red areas or blue areas or purple areas. We're making curriculum and designing programs for all kids in America, no matter where they are," said Emma Humphries, Chief Education Officer at iCivics.

Of the three states where iCivics is piloting its curriculum, Oklahoma is the only one with a so-called anti-critical race theory law. Humphries, though, said that wasn't an issue. "I just don't think there was anything in there that was problematic or ran counter to the law," she said.

The curriculum was customized to align with Oklahoma's standards, but no changes were needed based on the law, which specifically protects teachers' ability to teach concepts laid out in the state standards.

The law prohibits teaching eight concepts, including that one race is superior to another, that someone is inherently racist because of their race, or that someone should feel discomfort or guilt because of their race or sex.

That doesn't mean teachers aren't afraid of violating the law, intentionally or unintentionally, or being accused of doing so. Many people misinterpret the law to mean students can't feel uncomfortable at all.

"I would assume legislators know that we can't fully control how any one person's going to feel in a given moment. But what we can control is what we present and the primary sources we use and the discussion questions we ask," Humphries said.

Reading the language of the bill convinced Dave Corcoran, an assistant professor of history and coordinator of social studies education at Northeastern State University in Tahlequah, it was written by people who never spent time in classrooms.

"People don't understand that education is a really dynamic process and there's lots of emotions that will circulate for any given topic," said Corcoran, who has taught in middle and high schools and mentors student teachers and observes them in the classroom.

House Bill 1775, he said, has had little to no effect on how educators are prepared, aside from causing fear.

But he's also seeing increasing interest in teaching social studies, especially among women. Some of them are offended they didn't receive a robust civics education and want to do better.

"The responsibility of social studies teachers is citizenship education, right? It's about developing students that are engaged in communities. Voter participation is just one indication of that, but it is pathetic here," Corcoran said.

JENNIFER PALMER has been a reporter with Oklahoma Watch since 2016 and covers education. Contact her at (405) 761-0093 or jpalmer@oklahomawatch.org. Follow her on Twitter @jpalmerOKC.

WEARING RED
Native Americans whose relatives have gone missing or been killed wore red on Friday. **B8**

HOW TO AVOID LEARNING LOSS
Achieve Success Tutoring's, STEAM summer camp programs are an ideal alternative. **B3**

CAN DITCHING FAST FASHION For Thrifting Help Save The Planet?

By Nadira Makerson, Word In Black

OKLAHOMA STYLIST TYE COFFEY wears a head-to-toe thrifted outfit. PHOTO **COURTESY TYE COFFEY**

This story is part of "Earth Day Every Day," Word In Black's series exploring the environmental issues facing Black Americans and the solutions we're creating in the fight for climate justice.

From fashion YouTubers uploading videos of clothing hauls to celebrities posting on Instagram in new outfit after new outfit, in the age of social media, the pressure to always have something new and better to show off never ends. This is great for fast fashion brands — which produce double the amount of clothing today compared to in the year 2000 — but terrible for our planet.

Thankfully, many Black folks, who have been at the forefront of the climate justice movement for decades, are embracing sustainable fashion in an effort to protect our shared communities.

Oakland, California-based stylist Tye Coffey switched to thrifting and upcycling in 2017, and she hasn't looked back since.

"I saw a documentary in school called 'True Cost,' and it's a documentary that talks about fast fashion, what happens in fast fashion, and what the 'true cost' of fast fashion really is. Unfortunately, it's a lot of sweatshops and people who have to be displaced and taken away from their families," she explains.

By consistently overproducing products made of non-recyclable materials like polyester and nylon, the fashion industry is the world's second-largest contributor to climate change in terms of water and plastic pollution. Additionally, it's estimated that the average person throws away 81 pounds of clothes every year — and 85% of those discarded clothes end up in landfills or burned.

"A lot of things happen that are so ugly when it comes to the clothing industry, and I felt the weight of that on me with my clothes when I was shopping at Forever 21 constantly, and all these other places I knew were doing harm to people," Coffey says. "It felt really heavy on me."

How Sustainable Fashion Inspires Inclusivity

When Coffey first started going to her local thrift stores, she found that the clothes were not only more sustainable, but they were also cheaper, more size-inclusive, and gave her the space to develop her own personal style.

"Switching made me embrace myself. I've never had a more unique, more colorful wardrobe than I have right now," Coffey says. "People don't realize that you don't have to spend so much on looking good."

A 2020 survey by OnePoll found that 50% of women have shopping anxiety, and 14% of women say they can rarely find clothing in their size. When Coffey was still consuming fast fashion, she says she also felt embarrassed after going into stores and finding nothing that fit. Since switching to sustainable fashion, her self-confidence has increased.

"You have to look in thrift stores because sizes are not always labeled properly," she says, "but community members of all sizes bring the clothes in, so it's nice to know that the sizes are out there for everybody."

For those new to thrifting, the National Thrift Store Directory provides a searchable database — complete with reviews — of about 12,500 charity-driven thrift stores in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Coffey also suggests checking out Georgia Avenue Thrift, her favorite place to shop when in Washington D.C., and national chains like Goodwill and The Salvation Army.

In addition, to help folks make their wardrobe more environmentally friendly, Coffey has an online shop where she curates thrifted and upcycled clothes for others.

The Power of Upcycling

In addition to thrifting, Coffey is also a huge advocate for upcycling, which explains the process of using worn clothes and items to make something beautiful.

Coffey describes upcycling as "giving clothing another chance at life."

"Getting stains on your clothes doesn't mean you have to throw the piece of clothing away," she says. "I had a sweatshirt that got wine stains on it, and I ended up cutting off the mushrooms that were on the sweatshirt and embroidering them onto my jeans and gave them a new life. I liked the jeans even more after that. You never know what you can create."

A CALL TO EMBRACE THE TRUE BENEFIT OF "*Finding Strength In Being Vulnerable.*"

TEENS SUFFERING IN SILENCE *from* A1

You don't have to suffer in silence.

Struggling with suicidal ideation is common, and getting help is available. But, for Black youth in the U.S., the rates of suicide attempts are rising. Regularly facing stigma, racial discrimination, and implicit bias from healthcare providers, many Black teens are suicidal.

Abraham Sculley was one of those teens.

During his first year of college, he moved away from home. Got his first apartment. And felt the brunt of being the first in his family to attend college. As the son of immigrant parents, he says he thought the stress was normal.

Over a few months, Sculley outlined his symptoms. He struggled to sleep. He could not eat. And he did not have the same energy he used to.

A friend stepped in to ask if he was OK.

"She created a safe space for me to open up, and I shared with her what I was experiencing," he says. "I was having really dark and negative thoughts."

Sculley then went to see a counselor. To his surprise, he was diagnosed with major depressive disorder. Prior to his diagnosis, Sculley thought he was "going crazy."

Part of his treatment was regular medication and counseling. But, due to the stigma surrounding mental health in the Black community, he was hesitant to keep up with his treatment. After feeling better from the medication, he decided to stop taking it — without telling his psychiatrist.

Things took a turn.

"Every symptom that I was experiencing with depression intensified when I came off the medication. And that's when the suicidal ideation and thoughts started to creep in," Sculley says. "I was fearful that I may act on this thought, and I didn't trust myself. I wasn't confident that I could overcome the intensity of the feelings and thoughts that I was having about ending the pain by taking my life."

"In the Black community, we don't talk about feelings. We 'suck it up, buttercup,' and that really doesn't help anyone."

KHADIJAH BOOTH WATKINS, Associated Director, Child and

Adolescent Psychiatry Training Program, Massachusetts General Hospital

Sculley was 19 when he thought of ending his life.

He made the decision to leave school. He went home, hoping to get more support, but his family wasn't able to give him the help he needed.

He realized there were things he could go to his parents about and things he could only talk to with his therapist. Sculley was doing the work of educating his family on mental health while setting a blueprint for them to follow.

As a Black man, he says the mindset in the Black community to just push through contributed to his mental health struggles. The belief to push through is a means of survival, Sculley says — something many Black youth experience.

COVID-19 Impact on Black Youth Mental Health

Khadijah Booth Watkins is the associate director of the Child and Adolescent Psychiatry training program at Massachusetts General Hospital. She also serves on the advisory board at the Jed Foundation, a nonprofit working to prevent teen and young adult suicide. The organization has a resource center that helps youth manage their emotional needs and cope with life's challenges.

As a psychiatrist, she says there was a surge in the number of young people seeking mental health services during the pandemic.

"There was a tremendous amount of suffering and loss," Watkins says.

The Black community was hit hardest during the pandemic in terms of loss of employment, illness, death, and food insecurity — with the community recovering the slowest when it comes to employment.

A report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention details the increase of suicide attempts by self-poisoning among people aged 10-19 during COVID-19. In 2021, more than 54,000 teens aged 16-19 attempted suicide.

With school closures and uncertainty of illness, Watkins says youth were struggling with the lack of structure. One of the differences she noticed about Black youth was a reluctance to talk about depression and suicidality. The youth in her office would complain about physical symptoms — like headaches, tiredness, and no motivation.

"In the Black community, we don't talk about feelings. We 'suck it up, buttercup,' and that really doesn't help anyone," Watkins says. "If we hold it all in, we suffer in silence."

The biggest thing a parent, friend, or loved one can do is to make it OK to have conversations on mental health, she says. The danger comes when we wait to the point where we are struggling with suicidality. It is important to address the stigma so we can move forward as a community.

"Suicide is preventable," Watkins says.

There Is Strength in Vulnerability

Part of the reason Sculley did not talk about what he was experiencing during college was because he was uncomfortable. The friend who noticed his changing behavior patiently listened and provided a safe space for him to open up.

"I really felt validated at that moment," he says.

Now, at 27, he encourages others not to be afraid to check in with their friends. There is a common thread in the Black community that strength looks one way. Like resilience and endurance, and seeking help is the opposite of strength. But Sculley disagrees.

"There is strength in being vulnerable," he says. "There is strength in having the self-awareness to know I need help in this area. And having the courage to ask for help."

Despite working through his suicidal ideation in college, Sculley says the pandemic brought similar feelings back up. "I thought I beat this." But he came to terms with the fact that this global experience of trauma was not normal. With the nationwide Black Lives Matter protests and the media's portrayal of Black people dying, a series of questions flooded his mind.

"What role do I play? Where do I fit in? How do I survive with all that's going on?" he says. "So, there were times during the pandemic where I wasn't doing well mentally. And I was having these dark thoughts."

But, for Black youth or adults who are struggling with suicidal thoughts, Sculley has one message. "You are not alone." Help is available, and resources like The Suicide Prevention Lifeline are free to call or text at 988.

Although he initially dropped out of college, Sculley went back. He finished his degree, and is now working as a mental health speaker and advocate. In 2020, he published his first book about reshaping the way we think about depression.

"I found one of my greatest treasures through one of my darkest moments."

ANISSA DURHAM is a health data reporter for Word In Black, reporting on health in the Black community.

STUDENTS make slime at summer camp.
PHOTO **COURTESY OF ACHIEVE SUCCESS TUTORING**

WANT TO STOP **LEARNING LOSS? SEND YOUR KID**, TO SUMMER CAMP

By Maya Pottiger, Word In Black

"I need you to be OK with failing."

This is the message Aquarius Cain gives to students on the first day of camp every summer. Cain is the co-owner and CEO of Achieve Success Tutoring, which hosts a variety of STEAM camps all summer long.

"I love having that conversation with them," Cain says. "Yeah, you're gonna fail, and it's gonna be OK. It's gonna help you."

Throughout the summer, students assemble LEGO creations, make slime, and build robots. They compete in individual and team challenges. And they learn. The programs focus on critical thinking. Last year, the culminating project was for teams to build a mini golf course, and another project had students work together to make roller coasters out of cardstock and send a marble through it.

"There's that learning and discussion piece with it. We make sure they understand the background, the science behind all of this," Cain says. "It's like I'm sneaking in the learning while they're having fun."

And sneaking in that learning is especially important now. A new Learning Heroes study shows that parents are overestimating how well children are performing academically, also known as the "perception gap."

Parents should look at summer as "two to three months of opportunity to help kids catch up in fun ways," says Tracie Potts, an advisory board chair for Learning Heroes.

"As parents, we really need to realize where we are in that [perception] gap, and seek out those opportunities so our kids can be ready to move ahead when they go back," Potts says. "And summer is a great time to do that."

'Everyone Thinks It's Not Me'

Though "perception gap" might be a new concept for many, Learning Heroes has been researching it for eight years. And, while the pandemic shone a light on existing issues, Learning Heroes' research shows the perception gap hasn't dramatically changed since virtual learning.

"The gap is this is what most parents think looking at the report card and seeing A's and B's," Potts says. "The actual assessments show that there are a lot of kids out there who may be making good grades, but aren't necessarily reading or performing in math on grade level."

Their new campaign, called #GoBeyondGrades, looks at the perception gap in cities around the country. Nationally, about 89% of parents think their children are at or above grade level in math, compared to 92% of parents who think the same about reading levels. It's about 70% too high.

In Washington, D.C., for example, 84% of parents think their 8th grader is at or above grade level in math, but only 10% of D.C. students actually tested proficient or above. The gap is smaller but still sizeable for reading, with 83% of parents thinking their 8th grader is at or above grade level, but only 31% of D.C. students test at proficient or above.

"Part of the problem with the gap is everyone thinks 'it's not me,'" Potts says.

But knowing if your child is academically successful goes beyond reading notes from the teacher and looking at report cards. And summer is a good time to take those steps.

'This Is Not the Time to Take a Break'

In the aftermath of the pandemic, we are seeing a renewed emphasis on addressing the full range of our children's needs. Not just academics, but enrichment and healthy socialization. The focus has also extended to after school and summer learning.

"We're stemming learning loss," says Jodi Grant, the executive director of Afterschool Alliance. "Or, even better, creating opportunities that didn't exist."

And, Black parents are overwhelmingly concerned about their children losing academic ground during the summer months.

"All parents want something holistic for their kids, but 83% of Black parents say it's important to stem that losing academic ground, so they want their summer experience to help their child from losing academically," Grant says. This compares to 68% of white parents.

And to help meet that demand, Cain started offering virtual camps over the summer that dig deep into topics kids really struggle with, ranging from vocabulary and reading comprehension to geometry and fractions. They offer week-long sessions on different topic areas.

Cain emphasizes the importance of providing additional support for Black kids during the summer months. However, this support need not involve tedious hours of completing worksheets in a classroom setting. Instead, Cain suggests alternative options, such as exploring the physics of roller coasters during a visit to an amusement park or embarking on a trip to a museum. These activities not only foster critical thinking and creativity but also allow for a more engaging and fulfilling learning experience.

"This is not the time to take a break," Cain says.

'We're Nowhere Near Meeting Demand'

It's both good and bad that demand for summer learning programs is high. While it's a positive sign that parents, guardians, and students are seeking out these opportunities, the industry is facing shortages — both in programs and staffing.

According to a report from Afterschool Alliance, program providers are facing major challenges in hiring and retaining staff. The report showed that Fall 2021 was the peak of concern, with 71% of providers expressing "extremely/very concerned." While this worry dropped to 66% in Fall 2022, it remains a major obstacle in maintaining high-quality after-school programs.

'We're Nowhere Near Meeting Demand'

It's both good and bad that demand for summer learning programs is high. While it's a positive sign that parents, guardians, and students are seeking out these opportunities, the industry is facing shortages — both in programs and staffing.

According to a report from Afterschool Alliance, program providers are facing major challenges in hiring and retaining staff. The report showed that Fall 2021 was the peak of concern, with 71% of providers expressing "extremely/very concerned." While this worry dropped to 66% in Fall 2022, it remains a major obstacle in maintaining high-quality after-school programs.

"We're nowhere near meeting demand," Grant says.

Even though federal COVID-19 funding allowed programs to expand, the funding has expired, and waitlists are growing. Many programs used the federal funding to pay staff, which also allowed them to serve more kids, Grant says.

LEARNING LOSS *cont.* **B4**

STUDENTS have learning snuck in during summer camp at Achieve Success Tutoring. PHOTO **COURTESY OF ACHIEVE SUCCESS TUTORING**

LEARNING LOSS *from* B3

Demand for afterschool programs has remained robust since Fall 2021. However, waitlists for students and the ability to meet that demand continue to be a concern among program providers. As a result, in Fall 2022, 55% of afterschool program providers were worried about this.

If anything, demand is going up.

"We're in danger of losing kids because the cost to run the programs are going up, and the reimbursements are not," Grant says. "That's where we've seen the biggest drop off in kids, unfortunately, has been for parents that at one time could afford these programs scraping by and now can't."

At Achieve Success Tutoring, Cain says she starts out with one session and ends up opening a second camp to meet demand.

"[Parents] just really want [their kids] to be actively involved in something," Cain says. "And now, they are looking for more on the academic side."

A Focus on Holistic Wellbeing

But it's not just academic enrichment these programs are focusing on. There's a more intentional curriculum and a focus on a student's holistic wellbeing, Grant says.

"When you talk to parents, you talk to students, there's that light bulb, that excitement that having fun is so key to summer," Grant says. "It's something that they really lost, and you can do that and have learned at the same time."

Though many summer programs are full or deadlines have passed, there are still options to get that holistic learning in this summer.

Part of the #GoBeyondGrades campaign was to highlight local programs in six cities, which people in other locations can use as a jumping off point to find programs in their areas. It spotlights national programs, like Girls Who Code and Khan Academy, as well as reminding people to check public schools or community centers.

With parent advocacy, Potts wants to empower parents with the knowledge that they are not on the sidelines of their children's achievements, but are really an important part of it.

"The decisions that we make about summer learning, about out-of-school learning, about tutoring, about talking to the teacher — a big part of our campaign is to open those lines of communication, and we have resources to walk parents through," Potts says.

"These are the kinds of questions you should be asking. This is what an end of the year conversation should look like so you can get the information you need."

THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE CHURCH DIRECTORY

The Oklahoma Eagle **publishes news and annoucements for churches currently listed in** ***The Oklahoma Eagle's*** **Church Directory. For information, please call our office at (918) 582-7124**

Church Of The Living God

1559 E Reading St. Tulsa OK
(918) 584-3206

Minister RJ Smith

Sunday school – 9:30am
Sunday Worship – 10:45am
Monday Worship - 6:00pm
Wednesday Bible Study – 5:00pm

CAPERNAUM MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH

1962 N. Sheridan Rd.
(918) 834-4747

Pastor Ruthie I. Howard

Sunday School 10:00 a.m.
Morning Worship 11:00 a.m.

Bible Study & Prayer Wednesday 7:00 p.m.
For Transportation (918) 402-6027

Words of Wisdom Ministries FC

Temporarily meeting at the Courtyard Marriot 3340 S 79th E Ave Tulsa OK
(918) 230-3022

Pastors Wesley & Alfie Gray would like to invite you to come and experience the Word of God in action this Sunday!
God has a word for you,
He Guarantee's it!
You'll be glad you did!!!

The Oklahoma Eagle Church Directory

List your church in one of the largest church directories in Oklahoma.

Participation in the directory allows free church announcements/ church news.

Post events and celebrations. Priority over non-listed churches for news.

GTOMi

Gospel Tabernacle Outreach Ministries, Inc.
Traveling Outreach Ministries

609 E. Zion Street
Tulsa, Oklahoma
Elder Julius W. Bland Sr., Pastor
918-810-3882

ALL ARE WELCOME

MOHAWK FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

3329 E. 30th St. North • 834-0391

Sunday School 9:30 a.m.
Sunday Morning Worship 11 a.m.
Bible Study Wednesday 7 p.m.

Rev. Emanuel L. Collier, Sr. Pastor

Gethsemane Baptist Church

727 East 56th St. North
(918) 425-6613

Dr. W. T. Lauderdale

Sunday School
9:00 a.m.

Church Services
11:00 a.m.

The Oklahoma Eagle Church Directory

Participation in the Directory allows free church announcements and church news. Post events and celebrations. Priority over non-listed churches for news.

Zoe' Life Church of Tulsa

Rudisill Regional Library
1520 N Hartford Ave.
Tulsa OK 74106
(918) 409-4899

Pastor Richard and Cher Lyons

Sunday Worship: 1pm
Wed- Healing School: 6:30p – 8p

"The Righteous Are As Bold As A Lion." - Prov.28:1a

SOLID ROCK 7th DAY BAPTIST CHURCH

123 E. 59th St. North
Ph: (918) 425-2077

Pastor Rick Bruner

Sabbath School (Saturday)
9:30-10:45 a.m.
Praise & Worship 11:00 a.m.
Choir Rehearsal
Wednesday 6:00 p.m.

"The Seventh Day Is Still God's Sabbath"

Northside Christ Gospel Church

3101 N. M.L King Jr. Blvd.
Tulsa OK
(918) 625-2374

Sunday School – 10 am
Sunday Morning Worship – 10:45

Sunday Evening Prayer – 7 pm
Sunday Worship – 7:30 pm
Wednesday Prayer – 7:30 pm
Wednesday worship – 8pm

Rev. John W. Anderson

VERNON AME CHURCH

307-311 N. Greenwood Ave.
P: 918-587-1428
F: 918-587-0642
vernonamechurch@sbcglobal.net

Sunday Church School 8:30 am
Worship Service 10:00 am
Wednesday Bible Study 6:00 pm

Rev. Dr. Robert R. Allen Turner

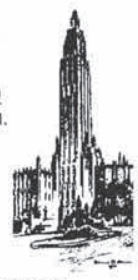
Place your church directory with us today! Advertising your church in *The Oklahoma Eagle* will get you results!
Call (918) 582-7124

The Oklahoma Eagle Church Directory

Participation in the Directory allows free church announcements and church news. Post events and celebrations. Priority over non-listed churches for news.

BOSTON AVENUE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

1301 S. Boston
(918) 583-5181
Rev. David Wiggs
Senior Minister



Sunday Worship
8:30 and 11:00 a.m.
Sunday School
9:40 a.m.
Sunday TV Worship
11:00 a.m.

KTUL Channel 8

TIMOTHY BAPTIST CHURCH

821 E. 46th St. N. • 425-8021

REV. TWAN T. JONES

Sunday School
9:45 a.m.
Sunday Morning Worship
11:00 a.m.

"We've come this far by faith"

NORTH PEORIA CHURCH OF CHRIST

2247 N. Peoria
Tulsa, Okla. 74106
(918) 425-1071

Warren Blakney, Minister

Sunday Bible School.....9:00 a.m.
Sunday Morning Worship.....10:00 a.m.
Sunday Evening Worship.....6:00 p.m.

There's no place, like this place, anywhere near this place.

Pettie Chapel CME

19364 S. S. Mingo Road.
Bixby, 74008
Phone: (918) 366-8870

Rev. Robert Givens

Sunday School 9:30 a.m.

Morning Worship 11:00 a.m.

"Where Peaceful Waters Flow"

Church In Power

732 E. 31st North
Tulsa, OK 74106 - (918) 835-1525

Pastor Bukky and Wunmi Alabi

Service times: 9am Sundays, 7pm Wed, and **Special Supernatural Breakthrough Services** every last Friday and Saturday of every month at 7pm and Sunday at 9am
Wednesday Bible Study – 6:30 p.m.
Church Ministries: Children's Church, CIP Praise Dancers, and CIP Praise Tem.

For Further Information call (918) 835-1525.

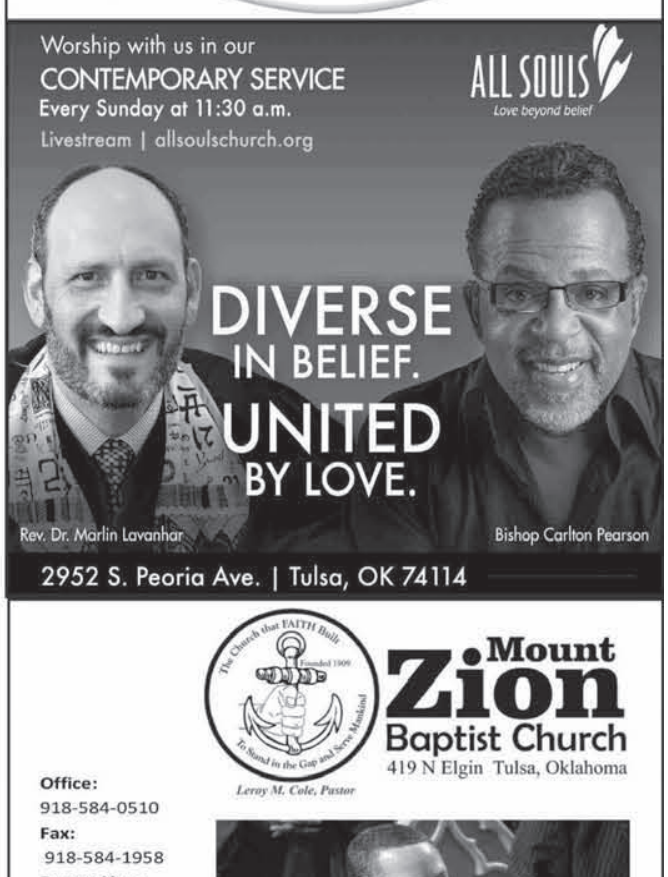
"Have Faith In God." Mark 11:22

List Your Church Today!

The Oklahoma Eagle Church Directory

Participate in *The Oklahoma Eagle's* weekly church directory. List in one of the largest church directories in Oklahoma.

- Participation in the Church Directory allows free Church announcements and Church news. Post your church events and celebrations.
- Priority over non-listed churches for news.



Mount Zion Baptist Church

419 N Elgin Tulsa, Oklahoma

Leroy M. Cole, Pastor

Office: 918-584-0510
Fax: 918-584-1958
Prayer Line: 918-584-PRAY
Sunday School 9:30 a.m.
Morning Worship 10:45
Wednesday Bible Study Noon and 7:00

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH NORTH TULSA

THE CHURCH WHERE THE HOLY SPIRIT LEADS US

Pastor Anthony L. & Mrs. Kelly Scott

Sunday	Wednesday
Sunday School – 9:30 a.m.	Prayer Meeting – 6:30 p.m.
Morning Worship – 11:00 a.m.	Bible Study – Noon & 7:00 p.m.

1414 N. Greenwood Ave.
Tulsa, OK 74103
918-582-5129
www.fbcnt.org

Find us on Facebook
WATCH US ON YouTube

"Teaching Minds Changing Hearts Touching the World"

In The Spirit Christian Church

"Come And Experience The Spirit"

1020 South Garnett
Tulsa, Okla., 74128
Phone: (918) 836-6823
Fax: (918) 836-6833

Rev. Sharyn Cosby-Willis,

Eclectic Praise, Extraordinary Worship, And Spirited Preaching.

Wednesday Services	Sunday Worship
10:00 a.m. Spirit Seniors	Church School
5:30 p.m. Support Groups	9:45 a.m.
6:30 p.m. Community Dinner	Worship
7:00 p.m. Bible Study	11:00 a.m.

Ministries: Administration, Children's Church, Childen's Choir, Spirited Kids, Guest Services, Intercessors, Men's Fellowship, Outreach and much more...

NOTICE

Published in The Oklahoma Eagle:
May 5 and 12, 2023.

NOTICE TO BIDDERS
SEALED BIDS FOR
PROJECT NO. 2036N6142Z

Notice is hereby given that pursuant to an order by the Mayor of the City of Tulsa, Oklahoma, sealed bids will be received in Room 260 of the Office of the City Clerk, City of Tulsa, 175 E. 2nd Street, Tulsa, Oklahoma 74103 until 8:30 a.m. the 2nd day of June, 2023 for furnishing all tools, materials and labor and performing the work necessary to be done in the construction of the following:

PROJECT NO. 2036N6142Z NON-ARTERIAL STREET REHABILITATION EAST TULSA

The entire cost of the improvement shall be paid from Account No. 2036N6142Z.Streets.NArtRhb.4282.42823122-541106 2036N6142z.Streets.NArtRhb.4283.42833122-541106

A MANDATORY Pre-Bid Conference is scheduled for Monday, May 16, 2023 at 9:30 a.m. and will be held through video conferencing with Microsoft Teams, invitation presented on the City of Tulsa's website at this link: https://www.cityoftulsa.org/government/departments/engineering-services/construction-bids/

Attendance at the Pre-Bid Conference is MANDATORY. Bids will not be received from contractors who did not attend the Pre-Bid Conference.

Bids will be accepted by the City Clerk from the holders of valid pre-qualifications certificates from the City of Tulsa in one or more of the following classifications: A or C

Drawings, specifications and contract documents for construction of said public improvements of the said project have been adopted by the Mayor of said City. Copies of same may be obtained at the Office of the Director of Engineering Services at the City of Tulsa Engineering Services, 2317 South Jackson, Room 103, North Building, for a non-refundable fee in the amount of $50.00 made payable to the City of Tulsa by check or money order.

Contract requirements shall include compliance as required by law pertaining to the practice of non-discrimination in employment.

The overall aspirational Small Business Enterprise utilization goal for this project is ten (10) percent.

Attention is called to Resolution No. 18145 of August 23, 1988, requiring bidders to commit to the goal of employing on the project at least fifty percent bona fide residents of the City of Tulsa and/or MSA in each employment classification.

Attention is called to Resolution 7404 of November 8, 2006, requiring bidders, their subcontractors and their lower-tier subcontractors to hire only citizens of the United States.

The City of Tulsa itself is exempt from the payment of any sales or use taxes, and pursuant to Title 68 O.S. Section 1356(10), direct vendors to the City are also exempt from those taxes. A bidder may exclude from his bid appropriate sales taxes, which he will not have to pay while acting for and on behalf of the City of Tulsa.

A Certified or Cashier's Check or Bidders Surety Bond, in the sum of 5% of the amount of the bid will be required from each bidder to be retained as liquidated damages in the event the successful bidder fails, neglects or refuses to enter into said contract for the construction of said public improvements for said project and furnish the necessary bonds within thirty days from and after the date the award is made.

The bidder to whom a contract is awarded will be required to furnish public liability and workmen's compensation insurance; Performance, Statutory, and Maintenance bonds acceptable to the City of Tulsa, in conformity with the requirements of the proposed contract documents. The Performance, Statutory, and Maintenance bonds shall be for one hundred percent (100%) of the contract price.

All bids will be opened and considered by the Bid Committee of said City at a meeting of said Committee to be held in the City Council Room of City Hall in said City at 9:00 a.m. on the 2nd day of June 2023.

Dated at Tulsa, Oklahoma, this 5th day of May 2023.

(SEAL)
Christina Chappell
City Clerk

CLASSIFIEDS

CLASSIFIEDS

OKLAHOMA CLASSIFIED AD NETWORK

FOR MORE INFO CALL
1-888-815-2672

WANT TO BUY

OLD GUITAR$ WANTED! LARRY BRING$ CA$H for vintage USA guitars, tube amps, banjos, mandolins, etc. Fender, Gibson, Martin, Gretsch, others. Call or text 918-288-2222. www.stringswest.com

STORM DAMAGE?

STORM DAMAGE? We have the perfect replacement options for you! Steel Buildings are great for Homes, Storage, and Shelters. CALL PENELOPE TODAY! 800-991-9251

ADVERTISE STATEWIDE

Put your message where it matters most – **IN OKLAHOMA NEWSPAPERS.** We can place your ad in 146 newspapers. For more information or to place an ad, **contact Landon Cobb at (405) 499-0022 or toll-free in OK at 1-888-815-2672.**

(LEFT) **SERAPHINE WARREN** jogs while on her "Trailing Ella Mae Prayer Walk" for murdered and missing indigenous people Friday, Aug. 5, 2022, in Catoosa, Okla. Friday, May 5, 2023, marks Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples Awareness Day, a solemn day meant to draw more attention to the disproportionate number of Indigenous people who have vanished or have faced violence. PHOTO **MIKE SIMONS/TULSA WORLD VIA AP, FILE**

(BOTTOM) **FAMILY MEMBERS** of missing and slain Native Americans gathered to watch New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham sign legislation during a ceremony in Albuquerque, N.M., on Thursday, Feb. 24, 2022. Friday, May 5, 2023, marks Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples Awareness Day, a solemn day meant to draw more attention to the disproportionate number of Indigenous people who have vanished or have faced violence. PHOTO **AP PHOTO/SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN, FILE**

Wearing Red

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — Native Americans whose relatives have gone missing or been killed wore red on Friday, a color synonymous with raising awareness about the disproportionate number of Indigenous people who have been victims of violence.

By **Susan Montoya Bryan,** Associated Press

INDIGENOUS MISSING RELATIVES

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples Awareness Day is held on May 5 — the birthday of Hanna Harris, who was only 21 when she was slain on the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation in Montana.

Countless more Indigenous people have gone missing since her body was found nearly a decade ago. Advocates describe it as a silent crisis, rooted in colonization, forced removal and government policies that led to the stamping out of culture and identity as entire communities were marginalized.

This weekend's marches, symposiums, prayer gatherings, art installations and ceremonies are meant to pressure policy makers in the U.S. and Canada to ensure equity when investigating such cases. The red dresses, they say, are used to call home the spirits of missing and slain Indigenous victims.

"We have to call this national state of emergency what it is -- a genocide," Carol McBride, president of the Native Women's Association of Canada, said in an email. She urged people to channel their grief into activism. "Wearing red is powerful."

Canada's House of Commons unanimously approved a motion this week calling on the government to declare a national state of emergency. Such a declaration would make more tools available, said Mel Critch, who works with the Native Women's Association of Canada and is co-chair of the group Manitoba Moon Voices.

The burden of tackling the problem has fallen largely to Indigenous women, relatives and other community members, Critch said.

"As this moves through the Senate, our communities will be watching and listening carefully, praying for its adoption and a day when this will end, when our children and families will be safe," Critch said.

Lawmakers in the U.S. introduced their own resolutions this week supporting the May 5 effort.

High rates of violence, sexual assault, homicides and disappearances of Indigenous people, particularly women, have festered for generations amid inadequate public safety resources in Indian Country, where tiny police forces are responsible for vast territories and a tangled web of local and federal jurisdictions often complicates efforts to track and communicate about cases as they happen.

About 4,200 missing and murdered cases have gone unsolved, according to U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs estimates. Federal health statistics document murder rates for Native American and Alaska Native women at 10 times the national rate.

Still, the number of missing and slain Indigenous women remains unknown. A 2021 review by the nonpartisan Government Accountability Office pointed to reporting problems, distrust of law enforcement and jurisdictional conflicts.

Recently adopted U.S. laws aim to improve data collection and law enforcement responses. A national commission began holding public meetings in April to craft more recommendations. Gary Restaino, the U.S. attorney for Arizona, will be listening to tribal leaders and families at next week's commission meeting in Flagstaff.

He said the Justice Department now prioritizes cases in Indian Country, bringing the Marshals Service, Drug Enforcement Administration and Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives to support the FBI when local or tribal police call for help.

"That, I think, is a real expansion from the way we have traditionally done these cases and should be an opportunity to get more resources into underserved areas in Indian Country," he said.

Many states have created their own task forces and commissions, aiming to keep cases from falling through the cracks. Prosecutors in New Mexico's largest judicial district have a special unit to help with missing person investigations involving Native Americans.

In California, lawmakers approved the creation of an alert system to help find Indigenous people missing under suspicious circumstances. The legislation came last year after the Yurok Tribe issued an emergency declaration after five Indigenous women were reported as missing or were killed within a span of 18 months.

"Every time someone goes missing in this state, that is tomorrow's historical trauma," said Abby Abinanti, the Yurok Tribe's chief judge.

The tribe plans to use drones to bolster its search and rescue program.

The Round Valley Indian Tribes in Northern California also declared an emergency, and imposed a curfew for minors following the recent killings of two tribal citizens.

Washington is creating a cold case investigations unit, and Oklahoma's governor signed legislation Monday ordering state public safety officials to work with tribes on an alert system named for Cherokee Nation citizen Kasey Russell, who went missing in 2016.

While there has been progress, state and federal lawmakers agree that more needs to be done.

California Assemblymember James Ramos told a hearing Tuesday that trends in his state don't show improvement. He wants qualified tribal law enforcement officers to be able to access a statewide telecommunications system as they investigate missing persons cases.

In New Mexico, advocates want the governor to issue a new executive order to chart the next phase of implementing recommendations made in an extensive task force report in 2020.

For Melody Delmar, who leads MMIP projects for New Mexico's Indian Affairs Department, the crisis is personal. As a social worker, she's often among the first people families call when they need help.

Her dream? A state office dedicated to Indian Country cases where families could be assigned a social worker.

"There's just so many levels of this and it can be complicated," she said. "But we also can look at this and know there are solutions out there too."

Nearly two years passed before federal authorities made an arrest in the case of Ella Mae Begay, a master Navajo weaver who went missing in 2021.

Her niece, Seraphine Warren, walked from the Navajo Nation to Washington D.C. to raise awareness. She has not given up finding her aunt — she's gathering volunteers for another search of the desert in the coming weeks.

Waiting for information to trickle down from authorities to grieving family members is like torture, Warren said.

"All that families want is for somebody to check on them, to see if their cases are still being investigated," said Warren, who will be marching in Seattle this weekend.

U.S. Interior Secretary Deb Haaland received a briefing Friday in Albuquerque from her agency's Missing and Murdered Unit, created in 2021. To date, the unit has investigated 728 cases; solved or closed 263 missing persons cases; and solved eight murder cases.

Advocates are watching closely as Congress hashes out budget requests for federal agencies, including the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Cuts could result in fewer law enforcement officers in areas that are already understaffed.

U.S. Rep. Raúl Grijalva, an Arizona Democrat, said Congress has a responsibility to honor trust and treaty obligations with Indian Country.

"And it's important to affirm that this is a priority," he said.