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NATION
Tune in to Brown at 70: A Reality Check on School Segregation | A14

By WORD IN BLACK

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VOL. 103 NO. 19

MAY 10, 2024 - MAY 16, 2024

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BRANJAE JACKSON, Tulsa, Okla. creative and music artist, featured on Rush Fest 2022 event posted. PHOTO JOSH NEW PHOTOGRAPHY

Branjae

BRANJAE, A Tulsa Singer Rises To Higher Ground

Kimberly Marsh
The Oklahoma Eagle

The video opens with a scene of the singer/songwriter Branjae coming home, tense and mumbling. She is finishing a drink when her explosive partner crashes through the door and threatens her. Her character finds the courage to see herself as the stronger, younger person she once was and leave it all behind to transform into her higher self, conjuring the support of a community waiting for her under the streetlight to dance and celebrate a walk into her higher self. *Cont. A3*



BRANJAE JACKSON, Tulsa, Okla. creative and music artist, during a 2023 performance. PHOTO FACEBOOK

Branjae

A Career Launched In Tulsa

From A2

This was the Billboard-showcased song and music video “Streetlight,” that Branjae produced in collaboration with Tulsa filmmaker Basil Childers. It brought a big slice of the Tulsa community together on a neighborhood street to support domestic violence survivors, to tell a story and inspire others.

Everything about this absorbing narrative is classic Branjae:

The Tulsa backdrop. The soulful voice. The uplifting ending. The Story.

Those who know her best recognize her stories in the songs she writes. She is a storyteller as well as a gifted lyricist and performer. She is known locally for her rhythmic performances as a co-fronter with Count Tutu, high vibrational solo albums and music videos, on-stage dance energy, and multiple style changes during a performance. She brings the venue to life with every move and every word.

Branjae is genre-fluid and flows from R&B to pop and synth/pop to funk/electronic pop. Her voice, resonant and alluring, is often compared to Indie Arie, Lauryn Hill, and Nina Simone. Her musical journey is also built upon her character and her process of self-discovery, gaining confidence, and claiming her power.

As the second child born to missionary parents in Broken Arrow, storytelling and empowering others comes naturally to Branjae. As a child, whether singing and performing in the living room or in a church, Branjae grew into her passion. She spent hours watching videos to practice with her favorite musicals and study pop culture

icons like Michael Jackson and Tina Turner. Today her stage presence reflects the extraordinary work of those two influences.

Branjae launched her career in Tulsa, working with singer and Full Flava Kings band frontman Charlie Redd. He ultimately persuaded her to strike out on her own. She formed Branjae & The All Stars, and by 2014, she had released her first solo album, Powersource, with some of the finest, most experienced session musicians in Tulsa. Through Powersource, Branjae invites listeners to join her on a path of self-discovery and growth. Her confidence in manifestation to chart her course as an artist and a businesswoman is what powers BranjaeMusic and her companies, Powersource Productions, and Powersource Properties. She ardently works toward her goals, and once her missions are accomplished, through art, introspection, and action, she shares them with others to inspire them to reach a higher life vibration.

Branjae’s story is a journey of how she uses her art, songwriting, and impressive live performances to give her the power to accomplish that herself. Her songs and her performances tell the stories that relate to others. Her songs reveal her path and how they evolved into her power. She transcended toxic relationships and betrayal, experienced racism, became an activist, shared her mental health journey. Known to close friends as a private person, Branjae has a public persona as an accomplished artist, beloved entertainer, video director, storyteller and CEO. Branjae’s first album, Powersource, launches her story with “The Message.”

“Listen to the words. Feel the spirit behind, and connect with the power that

lies inside of you. You’d be surprised. You, too, can overcome. You’d be shocked by the strength of our natural selves. We can only focus on where we’re going and less on the mistakes of our past. Love a little more. Trust more than before, and breathe when things don’t go our way. My story is not your story. You own your own path, but I hope my story gives you the strength to make it through your current chapter. Find where, or your power source. And I beg you to max out in this lifetime.” ~ “The Message”

The first track on Powersource set the tone for her career. Produced in 2014 with 16 songs, including 15 originals, Branjae opens with a letter to listeners in the form of melodies and harmonies created from her own experiences. Having found the strength to reflect on her past and change her path, she invites listeners on a journey of self-discovery and growth.

“The Message” segues into “All is Well,” where she sings of reaffirming life decisions, then leading into “Trust,” reflecting on vulnerability of trusting someone else with your own well-being and knowing when to protect yourself. “Now it’s time for you to leave so I can finally be relieved.” The meditative poetry of “Breathe” reminds us all to take time for self without so much focus on selfish needs and “turn a smile on anxiety.”

“Dream a dream of equality. And dream a dream of faith. Believe in the good of humanity. We can escape. We can escape. Everybody needs someone to love. Love somebody.” ~ “Everybody Needs”

In 2018 with her first video release with award-winning Tulsa filmmaker Jeremy Charles and Fire Thief Productions

(now Pursuit Films), Branjae’s lyrics on “Everybody Needs” uplifted her faith in humanity. Flipping through a video gallery of human portraits, the video reflects on timeless themes of inclusion, love and equality.

“It was a different time in life,” Branjae recalled. “It was a time of an election where people were tearing each other down, and the country was split. That person that you’re fighting is fighting for the same thing that you are, we all need the same thing. It was a time in my life where I was ready to talk about my situation with domestic violence that I had stayed quiet about for some time, at least musically. And it was the time to express that and share it and to work in the community.”

“Found my way in, now I’m gonna hit reverse and back outta here. Rolling backward, avoiding hazard and checkin’ if the coast is clear.” Step it to chorus: “I’m gonna get way outta here...and find my way home.. before the streetlights come on...” ~ “Streetlight”

In 2017 through 2019, Branjae expanded her portfolio and broke into new venues seen by wider audiences, playing at SXSW in Austin for three consecutive years, and performing at regional festivals, clubs, local parties, nonprofit galas, and fundraisers. Billboard Magazine premiered the Streetlight music video. She focused her activism on domestic violence working with Tulsa’s Domestic Violence Intervention Services, which held an exclusive screening for the community in partnership with the Tulsa Office of Film, Music, Arts & Culture, and Circle Cinema. Branjae seized opportunities to collaborate with other musicians, increased her speaking

Cont. A6

Ernie Fields: Trombonist, pianist, arranger, bandleader

By MICHAEL LAPRARIE, THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF OKLAHOMA HISTORY AND CULTURE



A "territory band" leader, Ernie Fields made his mark on a touring circuit that stretched between Kansas City, Tulsa, Oklahoma City, and Dallas in the 1930s and 1940s. Born in Nacogdoches, Texas, on August 28, 1904, and raised in Taft, Oklahoma, Fields settled in Tulsa after graduating in 1921 from the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. He soon began leading The Royal Entertainers, which became one of Tulsa's most popular dance orchestras during the 1920s. Fields initially refused offers to join other bands, believing that touring was an unacceptable lifestyle. Ironically, the Great Depression forced him to take his own band on the road in the early 1930s.

The Ernie Fields Orchestra became one of the most popular groups among African Americans

in the Southwest. Playing exciting big band jazz at nightclubs and open-air pavilions, the band eventually caught the attention of record producer John Hammond. Under his guidance Fields went to New York in 1939 and recorded "T-Town Blues" for Vocalion, a nationally distributed record label. With this minor hit under his belt he began nationwide tours, culminating in a 1942 engagement in Harlem's legendary Savoy Ballroom.

World War II interrupted the band's initial success. Fields began entertaining troops, playing for more than one hundred camp shows and twelve overseas broadcasts. After the war he kept a scaled-down version of the band together and continued to feature popular Oklahoma City singer Melvin Moore. Although the band regularly packed venues

with dancers and teenagers in the Southwest, nationwide success seemed elusive. In 1959 Fields finally earned widespread recognition. His mambo-style version of "In The Mood" shot into the top ten on the Billboard pop charts, and after thirty years in the music business Ernie Fields had a gold record.

He retired from the music business in the late 1960s, settling permanently in Tulsa and residing there until his death on May 11, 1997. In 1989 he was inducted into the Oklahoma Jazz Hall of Fame. His daughter Carmen pursued a successful career in broadcast journalism. Ernie Fields, Jr., followed his father's footsteps into music business and worked as a saxophonist, producer, and talent agent at the end of the twentieth century.

ERNIE FIELDS (Ernie Fields, Jr. Collection, OHS).

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.

Featured Last Week



Wendell Franklin Retires As Tulsa's Police Chief



Cindy McGhee: How One Woman Built A Business From Scratch



Atty & Son Of Payne County Dist. Court Judge Arrested for 2nd DUI

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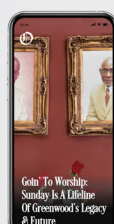
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The Oklahoma Eagle | Founded in 1921 | Vol. CII No. 19

THE OKLAHOMA EAGLE is published weekly on Fridays by The Oklahoma Eagle, LLC, 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

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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

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(918) 230-3022

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Elder Julius W. Bland
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Rev. Emanuel L. Collier, Sr. Pastor

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

Dr. W. T. Lauderdale

Sunday School 9:00 a.m.

Church Services 11:00 a.m.

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Rudisill Regional Library
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Tulsa OK 74106
(918) 409-4899

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

Pastor Rick Bruner

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Praise & Worship 11:00 a.m.

Choir Rehearsal Wednesday 6:00 p.m.

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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

vernnamechurch@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

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Sunday TV Worship 11:00 a.m.

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Warren Blakney, Minister

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Sunday Evening Worship.....6:00 p.m.

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Fax: 918-584-1958
Prayer Line: 918-584-PRAY
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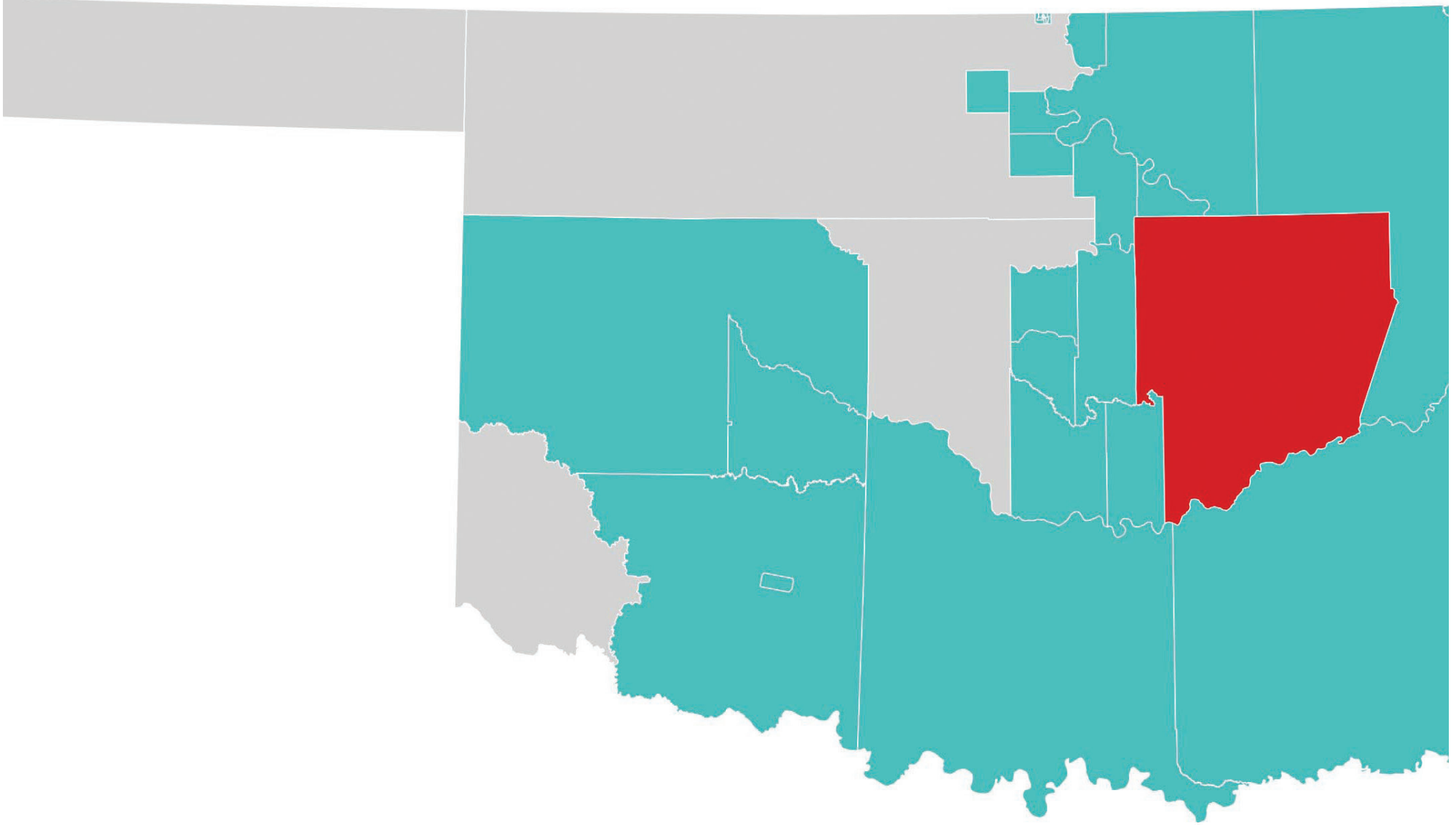


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MAP OF OKLAHOMA showing Oklahoma Tribal Statistical Areas (teal) with the Muskogee (Creek) Nation highlighted (red). PHOTO WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

MCM Sovereignty

Muskogee Nation Supreme Court To Decide Fate Of Creek Freedmen

Deon Osborne
The Oklahoma Eagle

When Creek Freedmen plaintiffs Rhonda Grayson and Jeff Kennedy [won their civil case](#) for citizenship in Muskogee Creek Nation (MSN) on Sept. 27, 2023, they thought it would end the years-long legal battle for full recognition in the tribal nation of their ancestors.

It didn't. Instead, the Attorney General for the Muskogee (Creek) Nation appealed the ruling to the [MCN Supreme Court](#). The Supreme Court can either uphold or reverse the district court's ruling after it hears oral arguments in Okmulgee on July 26.

Grayson and Kennedy are spending the next weeks preparing for oral arguments before the Supreme Court. The stakes are vital for both sides.

For the plaintiffs, it is the opportunity to fulfill a promise, a promise made in 1866 to grant tribal membership to Creek Freedmen. They are African Americans whose ancestors were enslaved by members of the Creek Nation. Both Grayson and Kennedy live in Oklahoma City.

Grayson, a genealogist, attended Douglass High School in OKC and the University of Central Oklahoma. Kennedy, a retired architect, studied at John Marshall High School in OKC and the University of Oklahoma.

"African Creeks played a crucial role in the Muskogee people's history, fighting alongside them during and after the war," Grayson said in a statement to the Oklahoma Eagle. "They had to flee from their homeland twice: first during the 1830s forced removal to Indian Territory and later during the Trail of Blood on Ice during the Civil War, where they fought alongside Chief Opothleyahola to Kansas. Chief Opothleyahola promised them

For the plaintiffs, it is the opportunity to fulfill a promise, a promise made in 1866 to grant tribal membership to Creek Freedmen.

freedom if they joined his party, emphasizing their loyalty and sacrifice. It is time to end this 40-year battle and restore the citizenship rights of the Creek Freedmen descendants."

"It's important to me because it's my birthright," Grayson told Muskogee (Creek) Nation District Judge Denette Mouser during the [April 2023](#) trial. In that trial, Judge Mouser firmly sided with Grayson and Kennedy.

"The decisions of the [Citizenship] Board in denying the citizenship applications of the plaintiffs are hereby reversed and remanded to the Citizenship Board of the Muskogee Nation for reconsideration of the plaintiffs' application for citizenship in accordance with the clear language of [Article II of the Treaty of 1866](#)," she ruled on Sept. 27, 2023.

For the defendants, the case could result in the loss of sovereignty for the Creeks, one of the tribes resettled in Oklahoma from the southern states in the 1830s. Supporters of the plaintiffs, including lawyers and some members of Congress, warn that those opposed to giving the Freedmen citizenship risks dismantling tribal sovereignty for the entire nation.

Treaties are "the supreme law of the land"

This often overlooked chapter of American history started back in the 1830s when some members of the Muskogee Creek Nation brought enslaved African Americans with them during the forced relocation of Native Americans from the southeastern United States to Indian Territory. The event was known as the Trail of Tears.

In exchange for ending its partial participation in supporting the Confederacy during the American Civil War, the Muskogee Nation was pushed to free all enslaved members and grant full citizenship to Creeks of African descent and their

descendants through the Treaty of 1866 with the U.S. government.

Article V of the U.S. Constitution states that treaties represent the "supreme law of the land."

"When we're talking about treaty rights of a nation, the only way that those can be abrogated is by an express abrogation from Congress," Jana Knott, an Oklahoma civil appeals lawyer, told The Oklahoma Eagle.

During the 2023 trial, Muskogee (Creek) Nation Attorney General Geri Wisner pushed back against that perspective. She argued that the tribal nation's 1979 Constitution superseded the Treaty of 1866. The 1979 MCN Constitution expelled all Creek Freedmen by adding a "by-blood" requirement. It ignored the fact that the classification of "Freedmen" and "by blood" was a creation by the U.S. government as it moved to break up Indigenous land into tribal allotments.

In 1893, the U.S. government established the [Dawes Rolls](#), which placed anyone who appeared to be of African descent on the Creek Freedmen roll, even if they had blood ties.

Muskogee Nation Judge sanctioned Muskogee Nation AG for "veiled threats"

After her argument failed to convince Judge Mouser to deny citizenship to Freedmen, Muskogee AG Wisner immediately appealed to the MCN Supreme Court. Her new argument for denying Freedmen takes a different approach that risks upending tribal sovereignty entirely, Freedmen supporters warn.

According to a court filing, District Judge Mouser sanctioned Wisner for allegedly attempting to intimidate the judge before her final verdict, according to a [court filing](#). Judge Mouser accused the AG of making "veiled threats" against her when she placed a document that described how to recall

Cont. A7

Branjae

"Free Facts," a sci-fi-inspired story of a woman waking up and being in a place where everyone was locked into a system, expected to act in one way.

From A3

engagements, and was asked to appear on the Emmy Award winning documentary series "Play It Loud."

"Eyes Wide. When it comes down to it... Coronavirus...this is how my city get [sic] down!" ~ Count Tutu & Friends Quarantine Party

Then, in March 2020, something unexpected happened. The COVID-19 pandemic. Everything stopped as everyone in the world had to adjust to extraordinary change, isolation, and loss while coping with the devastating impact of a 21st-century international pandemic.

Without the physical stage and audiences during 2020 and 2021, Branjae explored new ways to express herself and reach online audiences. She experimented with live performances, recorded music, and

ASMR sessions online through social media platforms. ASMR, which stands for "Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response," is known for creating a positive impact on relaxation and mental wellbeing.

During this time, Branjae appeared with Count Tutu & Friends Quarantine Party to co-create the Coronavirus Jam, an observation and real-life, virtual example of how people stayed connected using the internet, kept spirits lifted, and looked out for each other.

"Trying to understand all this human behavior. Holding to the notion our beliefs might save us. Swearing by the ignorance just won't change us. Canceling the scientist side-stepping evidence. Ima need the facts to set us free. ~ "Free Facts"

Branjae released the EP and music video "Free Facts" depicting, as the video logline states, a future harnessed society governed by cyber technology, which observes and regulates the thoughts, actions and beliefs of

its citizens. With the help of one true ally, a determined vigilante seeks liberation, but refuses to go alone. Just as when "Everybody Needs" was penned, the year 2021 was a time of questioning the world as Branjae observed it.

"I was looking at the world and my opinion of the world and how information was rampant and wrong. People were grasping onto whatever ounce of information that helped their point of view without the full picture or the full knowledge, and so I felt like we were all trapped in the system of belief that wasn't real."

Branjae describes "Free Facts" as a sci-fi-inspired story of a woman waking up and being in a place where everyone was locked into a system, expected to act in one way. It took just one other person to shatter her way of thinking, freeing her from the system so she could help other people liberate themselves.

The music video begins with a spoken story,

followed by a string of propaganda that rolls into the chorus: "I'm gonna need the facts to set us free. The facts will set us free. Do you want to be free?"

Resilience: Finding Strength

Just as the pandemic ended, Branjae experienced great family loss upon the death of her longtime companion German Shepherd, Aja, closely followed by the passing of her mother, who was her biggest supporter, wardrobe handler and a joyous presence at Branjae's shows caring for her daughter and the crew. As anyone can imagine, this threw her into a "walking depression."

"I probably wrote two, three, maybe four songs. But I wasn't a well of creativity. I write a lot, and I'm inspired a lot. I create things easily when I'm happy."

She wrote less and used the stage and her

Cont. A7

Branjae

“If you think I’m too much, maybe go find less.” - Branjae

From A6

work to get through the grief until, one day, it all caught up with her. It led her to make significant life changes to reconnect with herself mentally and emotionally. She began seeking therapy, bringing her full attention to her health, craft, businesses, and then the community.

“I felt like I needed to have a sober mind to really connect with who I am,” she said.

If you think I’m too much, maybe go find less. Something you impress. Wishing you all the best.” ~ “Too Much”

Branjae has reached new levels of growth since 2020, maturing in her approach to life, embracing the wisdom and experiences she has to share with others through mentoring, and re-establishing herself as a resilient, creative entrepreneur resolved in her ideas and commitment to her goals.

That resulted in the album project “Intravibronic” featuring the single and video “Too Much,” directed by filmmaker Bobby Ross in association with Emmy Award-winning Pursuit Films. The video logline describes “Too Much” as an Electric-Funk, Synth-Pop focusing on self-empowering and radical acceptance by fully embracing self, setting boundaries, and refusing to “shrink down” for anyone. “This empowering anthem offers others the option to exit peacefully and positively.”

“It is more of an inward perspective, with a purpose to inspire the folks outside,” she said.

Intravibronic is a departure from her previous, more outward, observational lyrics. Intravibronic reflects her state of evolution and how she chooses to be inspired or empowered by her life experiences.

A believer in manifestation, Branjae said, “I wanted to be able to



BRANJAE'S POWERSOURCE ALBUM COVER, released in 2014. PHOTO FACEBOOK

sing these words and say these words back, and then be in the presence of those words, even though at the time I wrote them I was not feeling that way. I was not feeling empowered and inspired. But I wrote those songs because I wanted a high vibrational record. I wanted something to help inspire and empower myself even before it reached the ears of other people.”

Taking Tulsa on the Road

Branjae has toured the country, played at New York City’s legendary Apollo Theater, and performed at the 10-day South By Southwest (SXSW) music festival in Austin four times. She spends time networking with other music industry professionals and media, driving her business and showcasing Tulsa on the road. Her Tulsa experience will help her

curate the same kinds of experiences in different cities as she expands her tours.

“I feel like Tulsa allowed me to cut my teeth. It allows me to sharpen my performance,” she said. “Tulsa is a place where I know what it feels like to be supported and how to build a community. It’s a very good model, really, to take other places and execute what works. Though each city is different, people can be different in different places, but the formula is kind of the same, you know, support me and I -will-support-you-type of attitude when going into a new market.

“Tulsa taught me that. Even if I have a part-time place somewhere else, Tulsa is definitely home, and the opportunities here are continuing to expand. Tulsa artists are starting to tour and go out to different



BRANJAE'S INTRAVIBRONIC ALBUM COVER, released in 2024. PHOTO FACEBOOK

places representing Tulsa music on the road with different audiences, and it’s being funded by Tulsa. It’s being supported by Tulsa. So that’s definitely a connection I’m not trying to sever, ever.”

Branjae’s journey is still unfolding with vitality, including pursuing a dream artist-in-residence in a city well-known for attracting top talent. But that’s a story for another time.

Works:

- [BranjaeMusic.com](#)
- [Branjae - Everybody Needs Official Mini-Track- Visual](#)
- [Branjae - Street Light - \[Official-Video\]](#)
- [Count Tutu and Friends Quarantine Party !!! This How My City Get Down! \(Coronavirus Jam\)](#)
- [Free Facts Music Video](#)
- [“TOO MUCH” - Official Video](#)

KIMBERLY MARSH is a contributing writer at the Oklahoma Eagle. She is a native Oklahoman. Public education is one of her passions.

MCM Sovereignty

A Challenge to established law and Muscogee Creek Nation Sovereignty

From A2

a judge on Judge Mouser’s desk.

“Thus, the Court’s only inference can be that the true motive of such action was at worst a veiled threat of removal from the bench, or at best an attempt to intimidate the Court prior to its ruling on Plaintiffs’ motion and/or before rendering final judgment,” Judge Mouser stated in her July 3, 2023 sanction order.

Muscogee Nation AG takes a new approach

Months later, in an opening brief filed with the MCN Supreme Court, AG Wisner argued a 1941 order from the Solicitor of the U. S. Department of the Interior affirming the tribal nation’s right to change its citizenship requirements as it deems fit.

The 1941 order affirmed that Creek Freedmen, having been granted full rights by the Treaty of 1866, were free to vote on future tribal constitutions. Yet, it is unclear how many Freedmen were allowed to vote in the 1979 election that established the new, more exclusive constitution.

“The United States specifically recognized that reorganization under the Oklahoma Indian Welfare Act gave full authority to the Five Civilized Tribes to recognize their membership on a new basis which may exclude Freedmen as long as Freedmen were allowed to vote on the acceptance of a constitution,” AG Wisner wrote in her opening brief to the MCN Supreme Court.

Attorneys, advocates, and members of Congress respond

In response, Damario Solomon-Simmons, a Tulsa attorney representing the Creek Freedmen plaintiffs, [filed a brief](#) pointing to the 1866 Treaty. Solomon-Simmons says that Cow-Tom, a well-known and celebrated Creek Freedman ancestor who Solomon-Simmons says is one of his relatives, helped negotiate the final document.

The treaty specified that all Muscogee (Creek) Freedmen, peoples of African descent, and their descendants “shall have and enjoy all the rights and privileges of Native citizens...”

By arguing against the treaty, Freedmen supporters worry AG Wisner threatens to unravel

“If we expect others to hold true that treaties are the supreme law of the land, then the AG cannot pick and choose which articles of a treaty she wants to adhere to, which is ultimately what the AG is doing.”

Amy Warne, advocate, community organizer, and Muscogee and Seminole Nations member.



CREEK COUNCIL HOUSE BUILDING, located in Okmulgee, Ok. Historic capitol of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation. PHOTO WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

the Muscogee (Creek) Nation’s independence in a state whose governor has labeled tribal sovereignty a [threat to the safety of Oklahomans](#).

Amy Warne is an advocate, community organizer, and Muscogee and Seminole Nations member.

“If we expect others to hold true that treaties are the supreme law of the land, then the AG cannot pick and choose which articles of a treaty she wants to adhere to, which is ultimately what the AG is doing,” she told The Oklahoma Eagle.

It was the Muscogee (Creek) Nation that, in 2020, successfully reaffirmed the sovereignty of tribal nations throughout eastern Oklahoma in the U.S. Supreme Court case [McGirt v. Oklahoma](#). Using Article I of that treaty, attorneys for MCN successfully convinced the U.S. High Court that Congress had never dis-established their reservation.

Meanwhile, AG Wisner appears to ignore Article II of that same treaty, which grants Creeks of African descent full citizenship rights.

“We are doing ourselves a disservice by showing others that they can pick apart a treaty and decide for themselves what will and won’t be honored. If we are to maintain our sovereignty, we must honor the whole of each treaty, and that means honoring Freedmen citizenship,” Warne said

Warne signed a March 15 legal brief seeking to express her concerns to the MCN Supreme Court, along with lawyers, advocates, tribal citizens, and lawmakers from around the country. The MCN Supreme Court [denied the motion](#) to hear the brief.

In April, members of Congress, led by Rep. Maxine Waters (D-Calif.), attempted to file a motion to have their concerns heard as well.

“Allowing an opinion letter by the Solicitor of the Department of the Interior to represent an implicit abrogation of the 1866 Treaty with the Creeks would set a dangerous precedent usurping the exclusive role of Congress and endanger the confidence of sovereign tribal nations in the obligations set forth in treaties,” the motion stated.

In total, thirteen U.S. House of Representatives members signed onto the motion. However, the MCN Supreme Court [dismissed their request](#) to be heard.

The future of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation is on the line

Muscogee (Creek) Nation leaders say excluding Black Creek Freedmen from citizenship is their sovereign right. Meanwhile, some citizens of the tribal nation hope for a future in which citizenship is granted to all who descend from the Dawes Roll, whether they are registered as “by-blood” or Freedmen.

“I hope the Court affirms the decision of the district court. The opinion from the district court was strongly tied to the treaty. It reaffirmed the treaty on its face and as applied to the plaintiffs,” Palmer Scott, an attorney and MCN citizen, told The Oklahoma Eagle.

“It will be remarkable if the Supreme Court of the Tribe reasons its way outside the treaty. I hope the superseding treaty, which proves the legal means of existence for our tribal nation, remains just that,” Scott said.

Ultimately, just four years after the full recognition of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation’s political authority was reaffirmed, citizens of the tribal nation hope that the sentiments of anti-Blackness rising in Oklahoma and elsewhere do not become their downfall.

“To me, the future of Indian Country includes all Natives , and for far too long, parts of Indian Country, including the Muscogee Nation, has not acknowledged our Freedmen, Black Indigenous, and Afro-Indigenous kin,” Warne said. “I look forward to the day when the Nation and our People realize we are stronger when we are together.”

The MCN Supreme Court has [scheduled oral arguments](#) for July 26 at 10 a.m. inside the Mound Building of the Tribal Headquarters at 2507 Lvmhvlke, in Okmulgee.

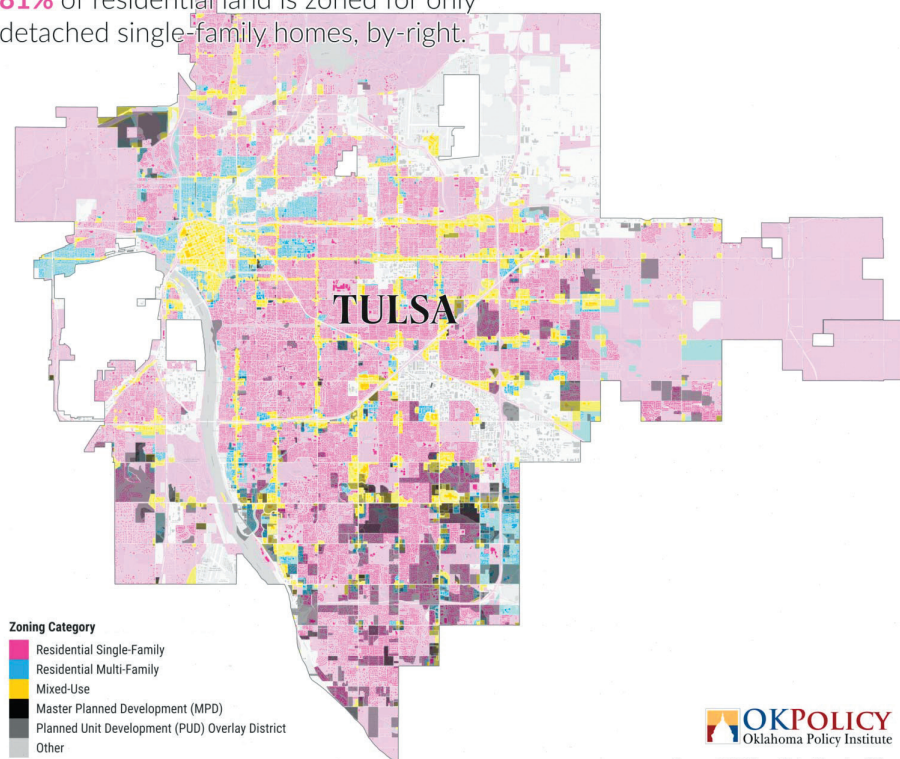
DEON OSBORNE is a contributor to The Oklahoma Eagle. Readers can follow his newsletter and podcast at: [drum.io/deonosborne](#).



CONSTRUCTION WORKERS on basket cranes work to build a new multiplex housing unit on Northwest Expressway near Pennsylvania Ave. in Oklahoma City on April 23, 2024. PHOTO HEATHER WARLICK/OKLAHOMA WATCH

Tulsa

81% of residential land is zoned for only detached single-family homes, by-right.



Zoned Out

Zoned Out: How Oklahoma Zoning Laws Contribute to the Housing Crisis

Heather Warlick
Oklahoma Watch

The American dream of owning a home with a fenced-in backyard for 2.5 children and a dog to play in is out of reach for many of Oklahoma's lowest-income families.

Oklahoma needs more than 77,000 affordable units to meet the demand of low and extremely low-income residents, those Oklahomans who earn as little as 30% of the area median income.

The average yearly earnings for Oklahoma's extremely low-income families is \$27,750. To afford a market-value two-bedroom rental in Oklahoma, without being cost-burdened, a household needs to earn \$37,436 per year or \$18 per hour. Property managers and mortgage brokers consider individuals to be cost-burdened if they spend more than 30% of their incomes on housing costs.

About 30% of Oklahoma's essential workers earn less than \$18 per hour, including restaurant workers, teaching assistants and health care providers.

Without housing that fits their budgets, cost-burdened Oklahoma families often sacrifice health care, nutrition and other necessities to keep a roof over their heads.

Zoning policies are a significant contributor to the problem, said Sabine Brown, Senior Policy Analyst of Infrastructure and Access at Oklahoma Policy Institute.

In Oklahoma, restrictive zoning ordinances in three of the largest cities are obstacles to housing the state's lowest-income families.

Residential land is disproportionately skewed toward single-family zoning, particularly in Norman, Oklahoma City and Tulsa. In Norman, 98% of residential land is zoned for single-family homes; in Oklahoma City, 96% and in Tulsa, 81% of residential land is zoned exclusively for single-family dwellings.

The state has space to accommodate the thousands of families that need affordable housing. Oklahoma City is the sixth fastest-growing city in the country, according to the 2023 U.S. Census, and it is the 20th most populous city in the United States.

The National Low Income Housing Coalition estimated

that Oklahoma has more than 133,000 extremely low-income households but only 55,700 affordable, available rental homes. That's about 42 affordable options for every 100 extremely low-income families.

Some of those families have homes they can afford, but many live in homes that cost more than half their incomes. Skyrocketing rental prices have outpaced paychecks, as the state holds the minimum wage at \$7.25 per hour.

With many states facing the same housing problems as Oklahoma, some are re-examining the zoning policies that affect where affordable homes can be built.

Rethinking Zoning Laws

In 2021, Norman changed zoning laws that previously required businesses to provide large parking lots for their patrons. The city now suggests the number of parking spaces a business should provide, instead of mandating them. The plan aims to encourage businesses to share parking areas, allowing more residential growth in urban core areas.

A proposal allowing people to build accessory dwelling units, or granny flats, will be brought to Oklahoma City's planning commission and city council in late spring or summer. Accessory dwellings allow homeowners to add additional housing to their property to use as rentals or for family members to reside in, which can help alleviate the lack of affordable and available housing units.

Reconsidering single-family zoning, easing parking requirements and allowing accessory dwelling units are ingredients of creating a more accessible landscape for potential home buyers, renters and developers.

In Oklahoma City and Tulsa, infill overlay districts have been implemented to allow some exceptions in single-family zones. These districts are typically in urban areas where, for example, a large, older home may be renovated to a multiplex. Another possibility is approval to build a multiplex unit where an empty lot is available.

"As we do with new zoning, tools like this overlay are the very beginning," said Tulsa Housing Policy Director Travis Hulse. "We kind of said, 'Look, we've got to try something. We've got to see if this works and evaluate it and monitor it. If it doesn't, then we're going to continue to try to do

something to evolve and adapt.'"

Finding the Missing Middle

Oklahomans need homes of nearly all sizes for purchase and for rent, but particularly dwellings priced between \$50,000 and \$300,000. That range could include tiny homes, granny flats, townhomes, duplexes and other multiplexes, which have become known as the missing middle.

They're missing because for decades, homes that differed from the single-family home mold were excluded, essentially outlawed, from large swaths of city residential zones. Middle refers to the price range and density those multiplexes are known for.

"It's an affordability thing for some people," Hulse said.

Other people may be looking to downsize from their family homes into apartments, or smaller units within people's home neighborhoods, he said. When moderately sized homes, both for rent and purchase, are few and far between, competition drives up prices and makes finding affordable units even more difficult for low-income families.

An influx of new residents and businesses have come to Oklahoma, but housing inventory hasn't kept up with demand.

"I feel like, in years past, there was a lot more speculative development," Hulse said.

That speculative development allowed the market to be more flexible and to react to changes and shifts in the economy.

"That doesn't happen as much anymore," Hulse said.

Exclusionary Zones Hinder Progress

Single-family zoning is known as exclusionary zoning since it has been used for decades to draw boundaries between areas where affluent families can reside and where lower-income families generally reside.

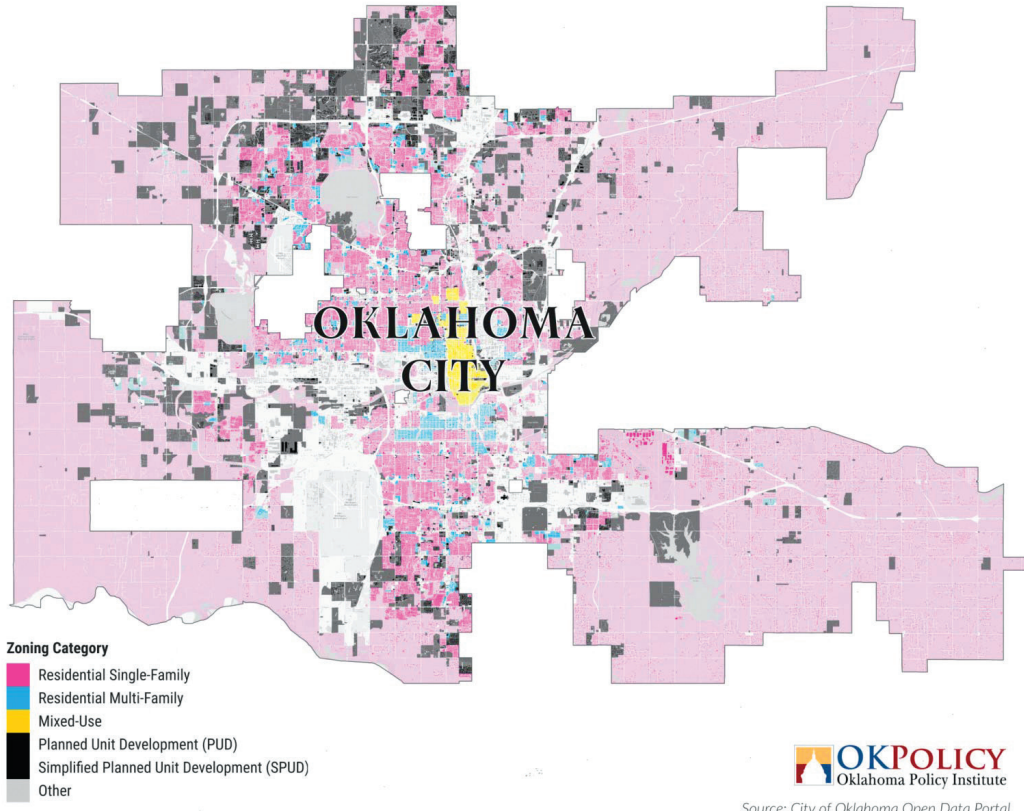
Zoning laws are considered a form of racial and class segregation by some.

Research from the Urban Institute concluded that single-family zoned neighborhoods tend to be owner-occupied by moderate-to-high-income white families. Multifamily-

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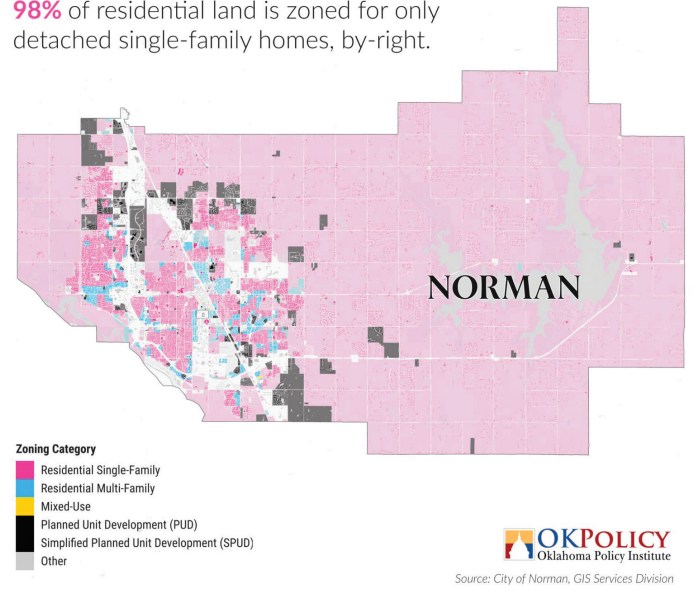
Oklahoma City

96% of residential land is zoned for only detached single-family homes, by-right.



Norman

98% of residential land is zoned for only detached single-family homes, by-right.



Zoned Out

Meeting the demand for access to more affordable housing in Tulsa & OKC

From A8

zoned areas tend toward more racially diverse renters with lower incomes.

“As used in Oklahoma cities, (single-family zoning) hinders the state’s ability to close the affordable housing gap,” Brown asserted in an Oklahoma Policy Institute article examining the three cities’ high percentages of single-family-zoned residential land.

If the state has enough homes for its growing population, market competition could drive rent prices down, easing the financial burden of Oklahoma renters.

Home prices could become more competitive, as well, allowing families to buy homes, rather than renting, which would free up rental units.

Eased restrictions on building in Oklahoma’s largest cities could also encourage developers to build more housing units.

“On top of zoning making it hard to build affordable housing, developers need financial assistance to keep housing costs affordable for the lower-income households,” Brown wrote.

Investing in Affordability

Several Oklahoma programs offer builders incentives to develop affordable housing for low-income families along with help for buyers.

Last session, legislators invested \$215 million in creating the Oklahoma Housing Stability Program, targeted at workforce housing.

While Tulsa and Oklahoma City plan to reinvest \$125.5 million in taxpayer money the cities have been awarded for housing, some zoning changes may be on the horizon.

Tulsa will receive \$75 million in 2025 from the city’s Improve Our Tulsa capital initiative and MAPS 4 will provide Oklahoma City \$55.5 million to be administered by the Oklahoma City Housing Authority.

Tulsa and Oklahoma City plan to reinvest \$125.5 million in taxpayer money the cities have been awarded for housing, some zoning changes may be on the horizon.

Oklahoma cities are trying to ease the state’s housing shortage but experts agree it is a complicated issue.

“We’re so far from having enough units for people,” said Sen. Julia Kirt, D-Oklahoma City.

“And we have so many different levels of government and of change that needs to happen to get where we need to be. So, yeah, we do need every change we can get.”

It’s not enough to eliminate single-family zoning if other elements that ease restrictions aren’t also implemented, according to the Urban Institute.

A multifaceted approach for zoning reform that combines easing single-family housing restrictions with other zoning alterations works better to bring about more new and renovated affordable housing units.

California, Oregon, and Washington have banned single-family zoning, though experts are still analyzing the effect the changed zoning laws have had on societal issues such as racial inequities.

More upward mobility is linked to areas zoned for single-family dwellings; the hope for many is that inclusionary zoning will result in more diverse neighborhoods where families of varied income levels have equal access to education, healthy food and mass transportation.

Modeling Successful Change

In 2019, Minneapolis began updating its zoning laws, starting with ending single-family zoning citywide; the city began allowing duplexes and triplexes in areas previously reserved for individual homes. The change was less impactful to the housing landscape as was hoped, but the number of permits

for multiplexes doubled during the next three years.

That city saw more dramatic increases in its affordable housing inventory with a combined approach of eliminating single-family zoning, eliminating parking requirements and by legalizing accessory dwelling units in 2015, as Oklahoma City is poised to do.

With its combined zoning changes, Minnesota’s affordable housing units doubled between 2015 and 2020. More than 90% of new units were in large buildings with at least 10 units.

Yes In My Backyard groups, known as YIMBY, frame the benefits for loosening restrictive zoning ordinances as gateways to creating more available, affordable housing, increasing neighborhood densities and integrating more walkable access to shopping, dining and amenities.

Proponents also cite decreased school segregation and climate change benefits as reasons to rethink exclusionary zoning, which can include lot and home size requirements, height minimums and limits.

The same groups point to pro-business aspects of lowering thresholds for property owners, emphasizing building and investment opportunities for home developers and businesses that cater to these neighborhoods.

A Growing Problem

The problem of not enough affordable housing didn’t just appear, said Oklahoma City Planning Director Geoff Butler. It’s been around for decades.

“Yes, it was worsened by the pandemic,” Butler said. “There are a lot of factors involved, but certainly the economic disruptions are a big part

of it.”

As interest rates for home purchases rise, people tend to put off moving. This slows developers from building, as they tend away from speculative development to instead building homes as they are sold.

Along with Oklahoma City’s proposed accessory dwelling ordinance, Butler said a comprehensive update to the city’s urban core zoning codes is in the works.

The city is getting bigger, he said. An increase in the population can equate to an increase in people experiencing homelessness. Several scenarios contribute to that: Landlords may evict tenants to renovate for higher-paying renters, people entering the state who can’t find affordable housing may be relegated to living in their cars or encampments and more demand for rental housing can induce price gouging on the part of property managers, pricing low-income families out of the market.

“That’s one of the reasons why we’re looking at revisiting our zoning code,” Butler said. “You know, we have a low cost of living. It’s not necessarily that we’re having the same problems that you would see in a coastal city, for example. The fact is, we have our fair share of low-to-moderate-income people in the city and they need housing. And regardless of the fact that our housing is more affordable than other cities, it’s still not affordable to them.”

HEATHER WARLICK is a reporter covering evictions, housing and homelessness. Contact her at (405) 226-1915 or hwarlick@oklahomawatch.org.

Oklahoma Hospitals

Millions More Go To Oklahoma Hospitals As Managed Care Begins

Paul Monies
Oklahoma Watch

Oklahoma hospitals are seeing a financial bump as the Oklahoma Health Care Authority makes the first of a new payment type under SoonerSelect, the state’s new managed care system for Medicaid.

The so-called enhanced directed payments are an addition to a program already in place that taxes hospitals based on their patient revenue to attract more federal money. Oklahoma’s Medicaid program is jointly funded by the state and federal government. It covers more than 1 million Oklahomans, including 533,000 children.

The extra money under the Supplemental Hospital Offset Payment Program helps hospitals make up a loss of revenue they

see when treating Medicaid patients. Reimbursements for that type of care are less than Medicare and much less than those from private insurance.

The enhanced directed payments, estimated at \$500 million per year, are meant to make up the difference between Medicare reimbursement rates and 90% of the average commercial rates from private insurance.

Hospitals received \$252.4 million from the new program in April, the first of two payments, with a similar amount expected to be sent in July. There are no restrictions on what hospitals do with the money, but the hope is that they will be able to expand their workforce and deal with higher costs from inflation. The payments will also give some predictability to cash flow at smaller, rural hospitals.

The SHOPP tax for hospitals increased to the maximum of 4% this year, up from 3.5%.

The tax isn’t levied on more than 35 rural hospitals that are designated critical-access hospitals, although they are eligible for the enhanced directed payments under managed care.

“From a state standpoint, increasing the tax is what allows us to draw down additional federal dollars,” said Ellen Buettner, the Health Care Authority’s chief executive officer. “We’re increasing the state share without the Legislature having to appropriate additional funds.”

Lawmakers approved the program during the 2022 session under Senate Bill 1396. The original SHOPP program was approved in 2012.

Easing the Transition

The enhanced directed payments are meant to ease the transition for Medicaid providers as the

state changes its payment model from fee-for-service to managed care. Under managed care, the state contracts with insurance companies, which, in turn, reimburse providers.

Lawmakers in 2023 also provided a \$200 million glide path for providers in the months before managed care began. That gap payment was sent to hospitals and physicians in August. Dental managed care under Medicaid began in February; medical managed care started in April.

Buettner said implementation has gone smoothly, although there have been glitches at times. One of the goals was to have an adequate network of providers for Medicaid patients across the state. On average, each of the three health insurance companies under contract had about 50,000 providers. That compared to between 65,000 and 70,000 providers under the

Cont. A12



THE LAWTON CORRECTIONAL AND REHABILITATION FACILITY is Oklahoma's only remaining private prison. PHOTO SOUTHWEST LEDGER

Prisoner Murdered

Staff Oversight Lax As Lawton Prisoner Murdered, Left Undetected in Trash Can

Keaton Ross
Oklahoma Watch

Three Lawton Correctional Facility staff members on duty when a prisoner was brutally murdered and left undetected in a trash can for hours violated several state policies and procedures, an internal Oklahoma Department of Corrections investigation determined.

Just before 10 a.m. on Oct. 26, prison staff discovered inmate Raymond Bailey unresponsive in a gray trash can placed near an entrance to housing unit 4A. Medical personnel pronounced Bailey dead at the scene and transferred his body to the Oklahoma State Medical Examiner's office, which ruled the death a homicide. The medical examiner's report indicated that Bailey had been hogtied, gagged and beaten to death with no staff intervention.

Closed-circuit television footage showed several prisoners entering and exiting Bailey's cell between 5 and 5:45 a.m., corrections department investigator Tommy Stranahan wrote in an incident report submitted to the Comanche County District Attorney's office. At 7:53 a.m. two prisoners exited the cell with a trash can that appeared to be filled with something heavy and placed it near the entrance to the housing unit.

Correctional officers walked past Bailey's cell several times between 5 a.m. and 6 a.m., the period when the fatal attack likely occurred, but did not shine a flashlight into the cell or otherwise attempt to investigate activity in the area.

Just before the attack, an officer on the unit allowed a prisoner from an adjacent pod into Bailey's housing unit without checking their credentials. That prisoner was observed entering Bailey's cell and is listed as a suspect in the murder investigation.

Just before 10 a.m. on Oct. 26, prison staff discovered inmate Raymond Bailey unresponsive in a gray trash can placed near an entrance to housing unit 4A.

Oklahoma Watch previously reported that prisoner advocates began receiving messages via state-issued tablets as early as 7 a.m. indicating that a prisoner had been murdered and placed inside a trash can, nearly three hours before staff found Bailey's body.

The motive for the murder remains unknown, with prisoners giving various accounts of Bailey owing money or being owed money. Stranahan's investigation recommended second-degree murder, possession of contraband and evidence tampering charges for four state prisoners. The Comanche County District Attorney's office has not yet filed charges.

The investigation did not recommend criminal charges for the three staff members on duty inside the unit, though an internal administrative probe found cause for their termination because they neglected required cell checks and search and seizure standards. Corrections department investigators recovered a 12.5-inch long improvised shank believed to be the murder weapon.

The delayed response to the attack has raised questions about the state's future with its last remaining private prison, which is owned and operated by The GEO Group and houses about 2,600 medium- and maximum-security prisoners. The Florida-based private corrections company is also facing litigation that alleges its staff willfully neglected the urgent medical needs of Oklahoma prisoner Justin Barrientos and caused his death in January 2023.

The Department of Corrections recently renewed its contract with The GEO Group to house Oklahoma prisoners in Lawton, which was set to expire on July 31, agency spokesperson Kay Thompson said. The agreement allows the state to purchase the facility and take over operations with a minimum of 180 days' notice. Thompson said the agency has a long-term goal to assume operations of Lawton,

but that would require staffing numbers to improve at recently acquired prisons in Hinton and Holdenville. When the state took over operations at the Allen Gamble Correctional Facility from CoreCivic last October, dozens of staff members opted to stay with the private company while others did not pass a state background check.

"We just operate more efficiently and stricter than private facilities do," Thompson said. "But to take on Lawton would be a massive strain on the agency."

Shad Hagan is a Stillwater-based justice reform advocate and a former case manager at the Dick Conner Correctional Center in Hominy. He said overnight cell checks should be done at least hourly because prisoners can create improvised devices to unlock their cell door and move around a housing unit.

But as Oklahoma's prison system struggles to recruit and retain correctional staff, Hagan said routine security checks are becoming a more arduous task at some prisons. He said officers at rural prisons often have long commutes and regularly work 12-hour shifts, six days a week.

"You're almost like a machine going from one spot to the next for several hours," Hagan said. "You might be able to do it for a few days, but they're not getting sleep, they're not getting time with their families and they're aggravated. It's a very bad thing they didn't do the count and it's a very big issue, but you have to understand that."

KEATON ROSS covers democracy and criminal justice for Oklahoma Watch. Contact him at (405) 831-9753 or Kross@Oklahomawatch.org. Follow him on Twitter at [@_KeatonRoss](https://twitter.com/_KeatonRoss).

New Laws

Stitt Signs Hundreds of Bills Into Law As Budget Negotiations Continue

Paul Monies
Oklahoma Watch

With less than a month left to go in the legislative session, House and Senate leaders are inching closer to a budget agreement and Gov. Kevin Stitt has signed hundreds of bills into law.

But disagreements over potential income tax cuts remain a sticking point among the Republicans in charge at the Capitol.

In a surprising move, Senate President Pro Tempore Greg Treat on Tuesday removed Senate Appropriations Chairman Roger Thompson, R-Okemah, and replaced him with Appropriations Vice Chairman Chuck Hall, R-Perry. Oklahoma City Sen. Paul Rosino will be the new vice chairman of that powerful committee at a key time for budget negotiations. Thompson had been the chairman since 2019.

“Senator Thompson has done a tremendous job as appropriations chairman and has a firm handle on the state budget,” Treat said in a news release Tuesday afternoon. “He has been an invaluable appropriations chairman, and I have the highest regard for Sen. Thompson. However, as we continue our transition into our new transparency efforts, it is vital to move forward accordingly.”

After last week’s final major legislative deadline, lawmakers are considering amended bills that have returned to their chamber for final approval before either heading to a conference committee or to the governor. Among them are Senate Bill 362, which makes changes to the state’s reading requirements. The House is considering amendments to House Bill 3278, which changes the requirements for high school graduation.

Meanwhile, a bill to allow schools to employ or have volunteer chaplains is headed back to the Senate after House members deleted language from a previously dormant bill, a legislative tactic commonly called shucking. SB 36 originally dealt with open records.

Stitt has signed more than 235 bills into law. On Tuesday, he signed a state immigration enforcement bill that was modeled after a similar bill in Texas. The House suspended its normal rules to consider Speaker Charles McCall’s HB 4156 for the first time just two weeks ago without going through committee.

The bill sat on Stitt’s desk after passing the House and Senate by veto-proof margins. Among the groups opposed to the bill were several religious leaders, including Oklahoma City Archbishop Paul Coakley, who called the bill “deeply flawed.” Several Oklahoma City schools had walkouts last week as some students protested the bill.

In approving HB 4156, Stitt also issued a rare signing statement, his first this year, that said law enforcement should not use the new enforcement powers to target any particular racial groups.

“Law enforcement can stop a person in public to investigate further only if reasonable suspicion of criminal activity exists,” the signing statement said. “Moreover, law enforcement are prohibited from profiling based on race. I am hopeful these facts help curb fears about this bill’s implications.”

Stitt earlier approved new medical marijuana packaging requirements, a change to how the three-member Corporation Commission discusses business and a bill allowing the Oklahoma Tax Commission to share additional information with the attorney general’s office, district attorneys and the Oklahoma Medical Marijuana Authority to combat money laundering related to illicit marijuana.

Stitt last week signed SB 1854, which would outlaw unauthorized camping on state-owned land and target homeless encampments.

Vetoed bills

The governor’s veto pen has also been active this year. Stitt has vetoed more than 20 bills. Lawmakers so far have managed to override just one veto, SB 60, back in the first week of the session. That bill extended the Board of Chiropractic Examiners until July 1, 2026. It was a holdover veto from the 2023 session and was among a clutch of Senate bills vetoed by Stitt as the House and Senate argued over private school tax credits last year.

The Senate last week voted to override SB 1470, the Oklahoma Survivors’ Act, which would allow leniency for criminal defendants if they can show abuse contributed to their offense.



OKLAHOMA GOV. KEVIN STITT gestures as he answers a question at a press conference at the Capitol in Oklahoma City on Friday, April 26, 2024. PHOTO PAUL MONIES/OKLAHOMA WATCH

Aside from the debate over cutting personal income taxes, differences remain between the House and Senate on the amount of funding for both common education and higher education. They remain at odds over how to deal with a backlog of deferred maintenance projects. The chambers also differ on how to fund their own operations and that of the Legislative Services Bureau.

But the House has yet to schedule an override vote. In his veto message, Stitt said it expanded mitigating circumstances in sentencing beyond domestic violence. The bill was opposed by the Oklahoma District Attorneys Association.

Among other criminal justice bills sent to the governor was SB 1702, which would shield businesses and individuals involved in the death penalty from public view. State law already shields most records related to capital punishment.

SB 1450 would increase the penalties for retail crime and organized retail crime. The House last week amended the bill and sent it back to the Senate. The changes were recommended by the Oklahoma Organized Retail Crime Task Force.

Several bills making changes to the state’s Energy Discrimination Elimination Act stalled before last week’s deadline. They include SB 1536, which would have the attorney general mediate disputes between the state treasurer and pension plan administrators over exemptions taken under the law. SB 1510 originally exempted cities and counties from the law, but amendments in the House expanded the law to agriculture, timber and mining companies. It failed in a House floor vote on April 25.

Budget talks ongoing

Transparency has been the operative word as lawmakers formulate this year’s budget. Under Treat, R-Oklahoma City, the senate unveiled its new budgeting process. That appeared to drag in March after the Senate approved a budget

resolution to kick off negotiations with the House. But then House budget writers unveiled an interactive budget transparency portal that shows just where the disagreements over the budget still remain.

House Speaker Charles McCall, R-Atoka, was optimistic as he briefed reporters on Monday about budget talks and the state’s response to the deadly outbreak of tornadoes in southern Oklahoma over the weekend.

Aside from the debate over cutting personal income taxes, differences remain between the House and Senate on the amount of funding for both common education and higher education. They remain at odds over how to deal with a backlog of deferred maintenance projects. The chambers also differ on how to fund their own operations and that of the Legislative Services Bureau.

“I still think we’re pretty far apart on the education things,” Treat told reporters on Thursday.

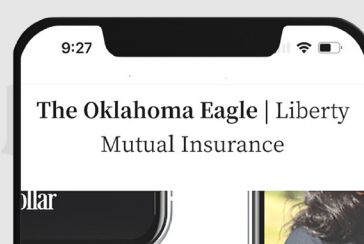
Despite the differences between Republicans on tax cuts, Stitt on Tuesday signed SB 2035, the Mason Treat Act. The bill was a top priority of Treat after his son, Mason, got in a serious car accident in January after being stopped by a sheriff’s deputy. It changes the state’s temporary car tag laws to minimize traffic stops.

PAUL MONIES has been a reporter with Oklahoma Watch since 2017 and covers state agencies and public health. Contact him at (571) 319-3289 or pmonies@oklahomawatch.org. Follow him on Twitter @pmonies.

The Oklahoma Eagle

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To amplify our core value of equity, through journalism and editorial is the cornerstone of our continued success.





ST. FRANCIS HOSPITAL at 61st and Yale in Tulsa, OK, Aug. 2, 2019. PHOTO STEPHEN PINGRY/TULSA WORLD

Oklahoma Hospitals

Closing the gap *between* government funding and private insurance payments

From A9

old fee-for-service model. The agency has held numerous town halls and virtual office hours to answer questions from health care providers.

“From a network adequacy standpoint, we feel pretty good,” Buettner said. “We received positive feedback, especially from hospitals and other providers. There are pockets, primarily small, independent practices, where we’re working through system glitches with them, but they’ve been very engaged to give us specific information so we can address that directly with the plans and get a resolution.”

Rich Rasmussen, president and CEO of the Oklahoma Hospital Association, said there have been some growing pains as the industry transitions to the Medicaid managed care model, which is to be expected. They include some glitches with mapping patient and payment databases with the new insurance companies under contract.

“That’s just what happens when you make a major system change like we’re going through,”

Rasmussen said. “There’s plenty of grace to be extended to everyone.”

For hospitals, he said the enhanced directed payments are meant to alleviate a long-time gap in what the government pays for health care and what private insurance pays.

“That directed payment is really a reflection of the underpayment,” Rasmussen said. “It’s allowing hospitals to take pressure off the premium that the private insurers are having to pass on to their customers. We are hopeful this additional reimbursement will allow hospitals to invest more into their communities and will create some sustainability.”

Oklahoma’s expansion of Medicaid under State Question 802 in 2020 reinforced the need to support rural hospitals, Rasmussen said. The enhanced payments translate into an investment in the sustainability of rural health care.

“If that rural hospital knows they’re going to be able to see their payments for those services be competitive with private health insurance, it makes it easier for them to make

appropriate investments to expand care or gives them more predictability for them to invest in capital improvements they need to make,” Rasmussen said. “Many of our rural hospitals really struggle with capital needs.”

Enhancing Primary Care

Apart from the hospital payments, other health care providers such as doctors and clinics can qualify for enhanced Medicaid reimbursements if they offer additional services under managed care. Buettner said they can get incentives for offering early intervention behavior health screening, after-hours access to services and regular wellness visits. It’s part of the agency’s goal of increasing access to primary care under the managed-care model.

The first quarterly payments under that provider incentive program will go out in July. Annually, the Health Care Authority expects that program to offer an additional \$100 million each year for primary care practitioners.

The three insurance companies offering

managed care plans under Medicaid – Aetna, Humana and Oklahoma Complete Health – have designed their own programs to enhance both care and quality of life for their members. Those include gift cards for wellness visits or well-child visits, stipends for after-school programs, YMCA memberships and diabetes screening and testing. Some involve pest control and financial literacy coaching.

“Some of the ones I really like are ones outside the box of what you would think a health insurance company would be doing,” Buettner said. “Some of the plans are offering financial assistance and food boxes for people who have food insecurity. They’re also offering legal assistance for criminal justice-involved individuals, including one where they assist people with expungements.”

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Tornadoes

Tornadoes kill 4 in Oklahoma and leave trail of destruction, including thousands without power

Ken Miller
Associated Press

SULPHUR, Okla. (AP) — Tornadoes killed at least four people in Oklahoma and left thousands without power Sunday after a destructive outbreak of severe weather flattened buildings in the heart of one rural town and injured dozens of people.

Nearly 30,000 people remained without electricity after tornadoes began late Saturday night. The destruction was extensive in Sulphur, a town of about 5,000 people, where many downtown buildings were reduced to rubble and roofs were sheared off houses across a 15-block radius.

“You just can’t believe the destruction,” Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt said during a visit to the hard-hit town. “It seems like every business downtown has been destroyed.”

Stitt said about 30 people were injured in Sulphur alone. Dozens of reported tornadoes have wreaked havoc in the nation’s midsection since Friday, with flood watches and warnings in effect Sunday for Oklahoma and other states — including Kansas, Missouri, Arkansas and Texas.

Authorities said the tornado in Sulphur began in a city park before tearing through the downtown, flipping cars and ripping the roofs and walls off brick buildings. Windows and doors were blown out of structures that remained standing.

Stitt said one of the victims was found in the bar in Sulphur, where about 20 people were sheltering inside when the storm hit. The injured were taken to the hospital and released.

Carolyn Goodman traveled to Sulphur from the nearby town of Ada in search of her former sister-in-law, who Goodman said was at a local bar before just before the tornado hit the area.

“The bar was destroyed,” Goodman said. “I know they probably won’t find her alive ... but I hope she is still alive.”

In Oklahoma, a tornado ripped through Holdenville, a town of about 5,000 people, late Saturday, killing two people, and injuring four others, Hughes County Emergency Medical Services said. Another person was killed along Interstate 35 near the southern Oklahoma city of Marietta, according to the Oklahoma Department of Emergency Management. A hospital was damaged in the town and authorities closed an interstate at the state line with Texas due to overturned vehicles and downed power lines.

In Holdenville, houses were demolished and road signs were bent to the ground in the community roughly 80 miles (130 kilometers) from Oklahoma City. The sound of chainsaws could be heard in the distance as workers began tackling the damage.

Stitt issued an executive order Sunday declaring a state of emergency in 12 counties due to the fallout from the severe weather as crews worked to clear debris and assess damage from the severe storms that downed power lines.

Nearly 30,000 customers were without power in Oklahoma as of midday Sunday, according to poweroutage.us, which tracks electric utility outages. In Texas, nearly 52,000 customers were without power.

At the Sulphur High School gym, families took cover from the storm late Saturday as

tornadoes ravaged the area. Jackalyn Wright said she and her family sheltered at the school’s gym and heard what sounded like a helicopter as the tornado touched down over them. Chad Smith, 43, said people ran into the gym as the wind picked up, the rain started coming faster and the doors slammed shut. “Just give me a beer and a lawn chair and I will sit outside and watch it,” Smith said. Instead, he took cover.

Residents in other states were also digging out from storm damage. A tornado in suburban Omaha, Nebraska, demolished homes and businesses Saturday as it moved for miles through farmland and into subdivisions, then slammed an Iowa town.

The tornado damage began Friday afternoon near Lincoln, Nebraska. An industrial building in Lancaster County was hit, causing it to collapse with 70 people inside. Several were trapped, but everyone was evacuated, and the three injuries were not life-threatening, authorities said.

One or possibly two tornadoes then spent around an hour creeping toward Omaha, leaving behind damage consistent with an EF3 twister, with winds of 135 to 165 mph (217 to 265 kph), said Chris Franks, a meteorologist in the National Weather Service’s Omaha office.

Nebraska Gov. Jim Pillen and Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds spent Saturday touring the damage and arranging for assistance for the damaged communities. Formal damage assessments are still underway, but the states plan to seek federal help.

Associated Press journalists Acacia Coronado in Austin, Texas, and Sophia Tareen in Chicago contributed to this report.



PEOPLE LOOK AT TORNADO DAMAGE IN SULPHUR, OKLA., Sunday, April 28, 2024, after severe storms hit the area the night before. PHOTO BRYAN TERRY/THE OKLAHOMAN VIA AP

VOICES HEARD: NEW CANCER STUDY

Groundbreaking American Cancer Society study will investigate link between breast cancer and race. **A13**

TUNE IN TO BROWN AT 70

Despite racially segregated public schools being ruled unconstitutional, we still face deeply entrenched divides. **A14**

Church Shootings Force Reckoning Between Faith and Security



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

Church Shootings

While violence in houses of worship isn't new, attacks have more than doubled since '22 — including an attempted shooting near Pittsburgh last weekend.

Federal Funding Available for Houses of Worship

Rev. Dorothy S. Boulware
Word In Black

In the wake of an increase in church shootings, federal government has set aside \$400 million to improve security at houses of worship.

Rev. Glenn Germany, pastor of Jesus' Dwelling Place Church in Pittsburgh, was halfway through his sermon last Sunday when a young man in jeans and a black T-shirt, got up from one of the pews and walked to the altar.

Holding a silver handgun, he aimed at the preacher and pulled the trigger. Germany dove behind a wooden lectern, the only cover he could find.

That's when the gun jammed. As a parishioner tackled the gunman, Germany ran over and wrestled the gun out of his grip and helped hold him until police arrived.

Unfolding on the church's live webcast, the incident was shocking, but not uncommon. This year alone, armed intruders have opened fire inside several houses of worship, including the Texas megachurch of

celebrity pastor Joel Osteen. There, security officers shot and killed a woman who shot and wounded several people, including an 11-year-old boy.

Studies show the number of shootings in houses of worship — fueled by political dissent, personal conflicts, non-specific mental health outbursts and even the overflow of domestic disputes — have more than doubled from 2022 to 2023. And threats against both Jewish and Muslim worship communities have spiked since the Israel-Hamas war began.

The worrisome trend has prompted the federal government to set aside more than \$400 million to help churches protect themselves with extra security equipment, with an application deadline of May 21. But there has also been an emergence of private companies that are specializing in providing security to churches.

Donell Trusty, owner of Trusty Training Solutions, has provided security to churches since launching his company in 2021. He says he trains his agents to assess the situation, then handle it swiftly and calmly.

Cont. A14

Cancer Study

VOICES Heard: New Cancer Study Will Center Black Women

In a groundbreaking study, the American Cancer Society will investigate the link between breast cancer and race by exclusively tracking Black women.

Jennifer Porter Gore
Word In Black

Overview: Researchers hope to enroll 100,000 Black women of various ages, looking for links between breast cancer and race.

Called "the emperor of all maladies," cancer strikes tens of thousands of Americans each year. But while the death rate from the disease has declined during the past two decades in the U.S., Black women still die from it at higher rates — and are more likely to die within 5 years of diagnosis — than white women.

That's despite the fact they are diagnosed less often.

Such blatant disparities led the American Cancer Society to launch what will likely be

Cont. A14

Church Shootings

Violence, More Common



PHOTO ADOBE IMAGES

From A13

“We have encountered individuals with mental issues who have come into the place of worship and caused disturbances,” Trusty says. “In these instances we have to understand the condition of the person and be able to navigate in a manner that will not disrupt the service or drive people away from future worship opportunities.”

Violence against communities of faith in houses of worship is not new.

The September 15, 1963 bombing at the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama — an attack that killed 4 little girls — is etched in civil rights history. In June 2015, a gunman hoping to stoke a race war killed 9 worshippers attending Bible study in Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina. Three years later, an assailant gunned down 11 people at Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, the deadliest mass shooting at a place of worship in U.S. history.

Still, the violence has become more common in the era of mass shootings and widely available handguns. Some 430 incidents occurred in 2023, more than double those in 2022 and eight times those of 2018, according to a Family Research Council Report.

Trusty, the security company owner, says

providing security for a house of worship typically calls for discretion, among the key traits he looks for in prospective employees.

“We always screen individuals to ensure they understand the sensitivity of the assignment. We don’t just find a random security office and send them,” Trusty says. “We want to ensure that they are sensitive to the needs of the house.”

Besides providing security, Trusty says he also provides training to help churches enhance their own security.

“We have encountered individuals who have had life-threatening situations occur to them” who have come for training,” to help deal with the trauma,” he says. “But they were able to overcome their issues so while we do provide training for people to get certified for firearms, tasers, etc., our training also can serve as a form of therapy.”

Janice Lee, owner of Afterhourz Security Consulting and Protection Services, counts churches among her government and business clients. She even attends services herself.

When her agency was smaller she had to personally guard the pastor. But it’s grown large enough that she can enjoy worship, knowing her agents are in place. Most churches need someone to guard the offering time and space and someone for the pastor, “unless there’s a particular threat,” Lee says. □

Brown

Tune in to Brown at 70: A Reality Check on School Segregation



(LEFT) DR. CAMIKA ROYAL, self-described “scholar warrior,” Royal is the program director and associate professor of Urban Education Leadership in the School of Education and Urban Studies at Morgan State University (RIGHT) SHARIF EL-MEKKI, a nationally recognized principal and U.S. Department of Education Principal Ambassador Fellow. (BELOW) DR. GARY ORFIELD, Professor of Education, Law, Political Science and Urban Planning at UCLA. PHOTOS PROVIDED

Word In Black

May 15, 2024, marks 70 years since the U.S. Supreme Court’s *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the landmark ruling that dismantled the legal framework of segregation in the nation’s public schools. Yet despite racially segregated public schools being ruled unconstitutional, we still face deeply entrenched divides decades later.

Schools in whiter, more affluent areas have more advanced placement courses, new technology, veteran teachers, and renovated facilities, while schools in predominantly Black and Brown neighborhoods, often make do with less. Much less.

This anniversary isn’t just a commemoration of a pivotal moment in history — it’s a call to action. That’s why *Word In Black*’s bringing together a panel of experts for “Brown at 70: A Reality Check on School Segregation,” a special live event on Wednesday, May 15, at 5 p.m. EST/ 2 p.m. PST.

- Click here to R.S.V.P. to watch on Facebook Live
- Click here to R.S.V.P. to watch on Zoom

Education reporter Aziah Siid will be joined in conversation by:

Dr. Camika Royal: A self-described “scholar warrior,” Royal is the program director and associate professor of Urban Education Leadership in the School of Education and Urban Studies at Morgan State University. She teaches, speaks, and writes about the intersections of race, politics, history, and urban school reform. Royal established the urban education minor during her time as a faculty member at Loyola University Maryland, and led the former Center for Innovation in Urban Education (CIUE). She is the author of the 2022 book “Not Paved For Us: Black Educators and Public School Reform in Philadelphia.”

Sharif El-Mekki: A nationally recognized principal and U.S. Department of Education Principal Ambassador Fellow, El-Mekki is the founder and chief executive officer of the Center for Black Educator Development. The center’s mission is to build the Black Teacher Pipeline to achieve educational equity and racial justice. He’s also a blogger on *Phillys7thWard*, a member of the 8 Black Hands podcast, and serves on several boards and committees focused on educational and racial justice.



Dr. Gary Orfield: A Professor of Education, Law, Political Science and Urban Planning at UCLA, Orfield’s scholarship focuses on the study of civil rights, education policy, urban policy, and minority opportunity. As a former Harvard University scholar, Orfield was co-founder and director of the Harvard Civil Rights Project and is now co-director of the Civil Rights Project/ Proyecto Derechos Civiles at UCLA. He’s the author of several books about school segregation and has given testimony in civil rights suits by the United States Department of Justice and many other civil rights, legal services, and educational organizations.

They’ll unpack the state of modern school segregation, the academic and social impact on Black children, legislative progress — and what students, parents, educators, and community members can do to truly make the promise of Brown our reality.

Cancer Study

Student enrollment increased

From A13

the largest study of cancer risk and its outcomes for Black women.

The VOICES of Black Women study, announced this week, plans to enroll more than 100,000 Black women ages 25 to 55 in the U.S. Along with tracking their health, the study will examine their barriers to treatment, including experiences of racism that increases the risk of developing or dying from cancer.

“I don’t think anybody chooses to not be healthy, right?” says Dr. Lauren McCullough, a co-principal investigator and the visiting scientific director at the American Cancer Society. “These are issues that are systemic, and we’re going to try and capture that.”

Researchers will follow the study’s participants, who have not been diagnosed with cancer, come from diverse backgrounds, and live in one of 20 states or Washington, D.C., where the overwhelming majority of Black women live. Over 30 years, participants will be surveyed about their behavioral, environmental and lived experiences.

“This survey is very different than some of our predecessors in that we’re also capturing qualitative data,” says McCullough. “We’re going to ask participants questions like, ‘Tell us about an experience that you’ve had in a healthcare setting.’ And so, we’re hoping that [information] will give us an accurate picture

of what women are experiencing in their day to day lives.”

Cancer is among several conditions in which Black people—particularly Black women—have higher rates of illness and poorer outcomes even when they have the hallmarks of being middle-class.

“We find that the magnitude of the disparity is actually biggest among women who are educated and have insurance,” McCullough adds. “What we’re calling diminishing returns—as their white counterparts’ [status] elevates, they have better outcomes, but for black women, we’re not achieving those same benefits.”

While Black women are diagnosed with cancer less often than white women, they are they more likely to die of it within five years, according to the National Cancer Institute. This is especially true for breast cancer, which from 2015 to 2019 killed Black women at a 40% higher rate than white women despite their rate of diagnoses being 4% lower. Black women were also 60% more likely than white women to die of cervical cancer and almost twice as likely to die of endometrial cancer.

Evaluating participants’ life histories will also be important—as will their experiences of racism and discrimination.

“You know, I always tell people, ‘Yes, I’m a black woman, I’m a doctor, I’m educated, but when I walk into a clinic, I am a black face,’” she says. “And there’s certain treatment that comes with that and it hasn’t been adequately

captured in the medical literature.”

Because the participants will be women who haven’t been diagnosed with cancer, every health outcome that emerges among the 100,000 participants will be studied.

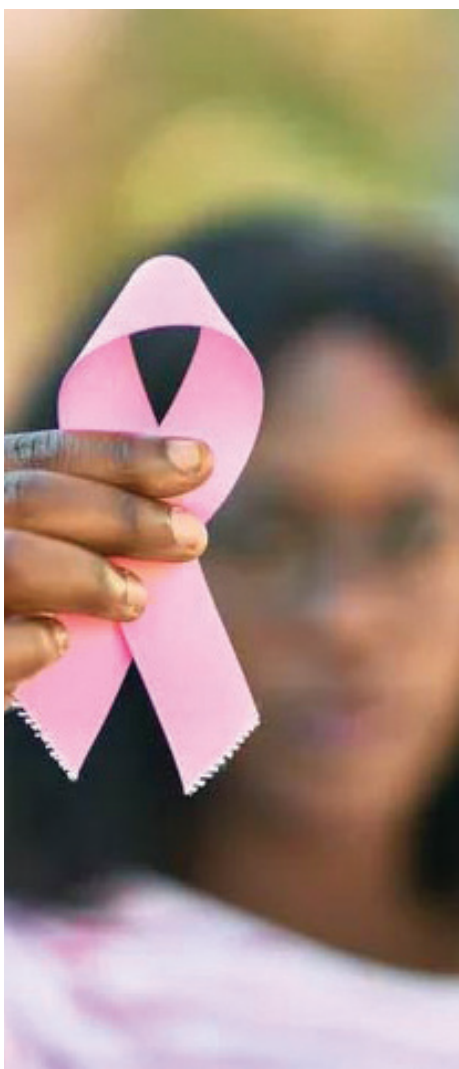
“We anticipate there will be a lot of studies around breast cancer and colorectal and endometrial cancer because those are the more prevalent types of cancers,” McCullough says. “But there will also be studies of the rarer cancers,” such as stomach and endometrial cancer.

Participants can enroll by registering on the VOICES website and completing a survey that asks about medical history, diet, sleep patterns, physical activity, mental health, stress levels and experiences of racism and discrimination. The survey takes about an hour, but it’s self-paced, so participants don’t have to complete it in one sitting.

Once they are enrolled, participants will be asked to fill out two 30-minute surveys each year.

Jennifer Porter Gore is a writer living in the Washington, D.C., area.

JENNIFER PORTER GORE is a writer living in the Washington, D.C., area

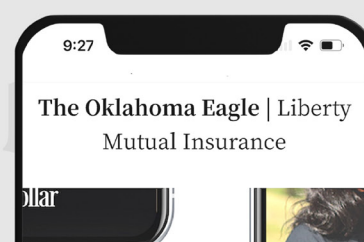
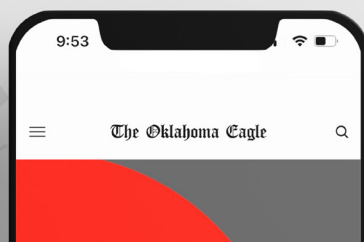


BLACK WOMEN are significantly more likely to die from breast cancer than white women — even though they are diagnosed less often. PHOTO GETTY IMAGES

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ALL-BLACK TOWN TOUR PARTICIPANTS visit the Boley Community Center, which offers services and programming for its senior citizens to infants. Boley is recognized as the largest and most well-known of the 50 All-Black towns of Oklahoma. PHOTO PROVIDED

Historic All-Black Town Tour To Commemorate Juneteenth

Dr. Jerry Goodwin
The Oklahoma Eagle

In observance of Juneteenth, the Tulsa City-County Library's African American Resource Center (AARC) and the Tulsa Library Trust are sponsoring the 25th Annual Historic All-Black Town Tour on June 1.

The tour will visit the town of Langston and historic sites in Oklahoma City. It also will visit the African American History Exhibit at the Oklahoma History Center in Oklahoma City. This year, Shirley Ann Nero, distinguished historian, native of all-Black town Clearview and board member of the Oklahoma African American Educators Hall of Fame, will return as a tour guide. She will be joined by Darren Williams, a teacher at McLain High School of Science and Technology.

The tour serves as the AARC's celebration of Juneteenth, which memorializes the emancipation of enslaved African Americans, honored annually on June 19. It was on this date in 1865 that African American people still enslaved in Texas, particularly Galveston, learned of the

Emancipation Proclamation that announced the end of slavery and the right to freedom from bondage, by Pres. Abraham Lincoln. The annual All-Black Town Tour celebrates existing and historical towns and communities that were built after emancipation.

Tickets, which are nonrefundable, can be purchased for \$55 each in advance and in person at Rudisill Regional Library by card, cash or check. Tickets include breakfast, lunch, and museum fare. Seating is limited to a first-come-first-serve basis, and seat sharing is prohibited. Youths ages 17 and under must be accompanied by an adult guardian.

The bus will leave at 8 a.m. from Rudisill Regional Library, 1520 N. Hartford Ave., and return to the same location at 5:30 p.m. Breakfast and sign-in will begin at 7 a.m. inside the Library.

For more information on library programs and services, call (918) 549-7323 or visit www.tulsalibrary.org.

Continuing & Summer Ed. Scholarships Announced



LYDIA CHILDERS (l) from Norman completes a project with Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Kevin Randall II at a Transition STEM Camp offered by the Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services in 2023. PHOTO PROVIDED

Dr. Jerry Goodwin
The Oklahoma Eagle

Several scholarships are available for students continuing their education and for the summer. Below is a partial listing of scholarships.

Deadline: See specific program for details

The American Association of Blacks in Energy, Oklahoma Chapter has released information about its 2024-2025 scholarship.

Graduating high school seniors are encouraged to apply. The applicant must have a 3.0GPA, has plans to major in business, physical sciences, technology, engineering, or a mathematics field (STEM) in preparation for a career in the energy sector. Thousands of dollars are available for recipients of the financial awards.

Officers are Joe McCormick, president; Ieashia McReynolds, vice president; Johnnetta Johnson, treasurer; and Amber Boyd, secretary.

The Oklahoma Chapter of AABE is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization committed to increasing awareness of energy-related issues, student outreach, educational programming, and professional development.

For more information, contact aabeok2023@gmail.com

Deadline: See specific program for details

Black Women's Entrepreneurial Leadership Accelerator Fall 2024 program has announced its

annual professional development opportunity sponsored by Babson College. Applications are now open for the Cohort 6 class.

The BWEL program was designed by and for Black women seeking to hone their entrepreneurial leadership skills, grow their network, and gain resources to propel their businesses and professional growth. The program will provide participants with practical insights and tools to navigate procurement, financing, business growth, and other untapped opportunities for professional development.

Applicants will join a group of 20 Black women entrepreneurs and get access to vital business expertise and a supportive community of mentors and fellow women founders. Interested business professionals are encouraged to apply to Babson's Black Women's Entrepreneurial Leadership (BWEL) program, created for Black women founders by a leading school for entrepreneurship education in the world.

The seven-week accelerator will provide participants with practical insights and tools to navigate procurement and other untapped opportunities for growth.

For more information, visit www.babson.edu/BWEL.

Deadline: Specific programs for deadlines

Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services has programs for students with

disabilities. The programs will provide free summer job training and paid internships for students.

More than 400 youth with disabilities are expected to start free summer training and employment programs offered in 24 rural and urban communities by ODRS's Transition program.

"What an exciting time in Oklahoma for students to have opportunities to help students make decisions about their future careers," said DRS Transition Coordinator Renee Sansom Briscoe.

The following programs are offered by ODRS:

BEST STEP - Building Employment Skills for Today and Summer Transition Employment Program

BEST STEP (Building Employment Skills for Today and Summer Transition Employment Program) is a five-week, two-part career planning and paid on-the-job training program for students with disabilities, ages 16 and older. Participants must be returning to high school in August 2024.

For more information on the BEST STEP program, visit the link above or contact Renee Briscoe, rsansom@okdrs.gov or (405) 212-7789.

STEM Camps

STEM Camps are open to Oklahoma students, ages 14-21, with documented physical, mental, or cognitive disabilities. Students learn to effectively use

computers, software, and related technologies to design and create Power Racer dragsters, High Tech (HT) powered racers, shirts, hats, mouse pads, bracelets, and pin-back buttons.

For more information on the STEM camps program, visit the link above or contact Renee Briscoe, rsansom@okdrs.gov or (405) 212-7789.

Summer 2024 VIBE

Transition VIBE (Visually Impaired and Blindness Empowerment) offers assessment and career or higher education exploration for students with visual disabilities. Students strengthen skills through customized training in independent living, interviewing, communication, technology use, team building, and travel and transportation. VIBE takes place June 23 through 28 at DRS' Oklahoma School for the Blind in Muskogee.

For more information, visit the link above or contact Dietra Woody at (405) 522-3410 or Magan Rowan (405) 522-3380.

DRS Transition serves more than 3,000 students, 16-21 year olds, during the school year through employment programs offered by DRS' Vocational Rehabilitation and Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

For additional information about other ODRS services, visit <http://www.okdrs.gov> or phone (800) 845-8476.

Events

May

May 10 - May 25

Nowata Historical Society and Museum, 136 S. Oak St., will be hosting "Voices and Votes: Democracy in America" exhibition. From the Smithsonian's Museum on Main Street, the exhibition explores the complex history of the nation, including The Revolution, Civil Rights, Suffrage, Elections, Protests, and the Rights and Responsibilities of Citizens. The project is touring the state beginning in Nowata. For more information, visit www.okhumanities.org or call (918) 273-1191.

May 10 - May 12

Mayfest will be held near 101 E. Archer in the Arts District, Friday and Saturday, 11 a.m. - 11 p.m. and on Sunday, 11 a.m. - 6 p.m. The event is presented by MidFirst Bank. For more information, visit www.tulsamayfest.org.

May 10

North Tulsa Economic Development Initiative (NTEDI) Book Scholarship Banquet at the Greenwood Cultural Center, 322 N. Greenwood Ave., 6 p.m. - 8 p.m. The theme is "Investing in Tomorrow." For more information, contact ntedi.north@aol.com or lturner_ntedi@aol.com.

May 11

Fiesta de Mayo will be held in the City of Broken Arrow, 2 p.m. - 10 p.m. The event is sponsored by Morelos Supermercados.

May 12

Circle Cinema to show "Miss Juneteenth on Mother's Day, May 12, 4:30 p.m. Mothers will be provided free admission. For more information, visit <https://www.circlecinema.org/movies-events/miss-juneteenth>.

May 15-19

Mount Rose Baptist Church, 1137 N. MLK Blvd., will hold the First Pastor and Wife Anniversary for Pastor Kevin Williams and Lady Danielle Williams from May 15-19. The scheduled speakers are Rev. Larry Hooks, Gethsemane Baptist Church (May 15, 7 p.m.); Rev. Rex Woodfork, St. John Baptist Church (May 16, 7 p.m.); Dr. Rodney Goss, Morning Star Baptist Church (May 17, 7 p.m.); Dr. Eric Gill, Antioch Baptist Church (May 19, 11 a.m.); and Dr. Leroy Cole, Mt. Zion Baptist Church (May 19, 3 p.m.). For more information, call (918) 584-7522.

May 16-18

Black Wall Street Rally and Festival will feature speakers, live entertainment, history tours, vendors, and much more in the Greenwood Business District. For more information, contact www.blackwallstreetrally.com.

May 16

Food on the Move OK will be hosting Community Food and Resource Festivals during May. The FOTMOK events are scheduled for May 16 (TCC Northeast Campus, 3727 E. Apache, 11:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.), May 21 (Chamberlain Park, 4940 N. Frankfort Ave., 5:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.), and May 28 (Northwest Tulsa HUB, 19 S. 49th W. Ave., 5:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.). For more information, visit www.foodon-themoveok.com.

May 18

Theatre North Tulsa will present "Stew" at the Tulsa Performing Arts Center, 110 E. 2nd St., May 18 (8 p.m.), 19 (3 p.m.), 25 (8 p.m.), and 26 (3 p.m.). According to Theatre North, the play, a 2021 Pulitzer Prize finalist, is "a compelling and heartfelt play by Zora Howard that explores the dynamics of three generations of African American women as they come together to prepare a family meal." The play is directed by Michelle Cullum. For more information, contact (918) 596-7111 or theater-northmw@hotmail.com

May 21

Food on the Move OK will be hosting Community Food and Resource Festivals during May. The FOTMOK events are scheduled for May 21 (Chamberlain Park, 4940 N. Frankfort Ave., 5:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.), and May 28 (Northwest Tulsa HUB, 19 S. 49th W. Ave., 5:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.). For more information, visit www.foodon-themoveok.com.

May 22 - Aug 14

Oasis Fresh Market, 1725 N. Peoria Ave., is sponsoring free breakfast and lunch for kids and teenagers under 18 years old from Mon.-Fri. during the summer. Breakfast will be served from 9 a.m. - 10 a.m. and lunch will be available from 12 p.m. - 2 p.m. Extracurricular activities will be offered to the kids and teenagers. For more information, call (918) 935-2092 or send an email to storemanager@oasisfreshmarket.net.

The Tina Turner Musical

REVEALS TRIALS AND TRIUMPHS

The Broadway Musical Makes A Stop In Tulsa, May 14-19

By Kimberly Marsh



NAOMI RODGERS as 'Tina Turner' in the North American touring production of TINA, THE TINA TURNER MUSICAL. Photo by PHOTO MATTHEW MURPHY FOR MURPHYMADE, 2022



NAOMI RODGERS performing "Proud Mary" as 'Tina Turner' and the cast of the North American touring production of TINA - THE TINA TURNER MUSICAL. PHOTO MATTHEW MURPHY FOR MURPHYMADE, 2022

Ike Turner may have had multiple sides to his personality, according to Tulsans who knew him and the actor who plays him in the musical, "Tina, The Tina Turner Musical," coming to Tulsa next week. However, the Ike Turner the public has seen is a violent man.

The arc of Tina Turner's career is well-known. Although Ike's story is lesser known, he had a powerful influence on Tina's life and career. They had a family together, and he witnessed Tina rise to superstardom.

The 1993 movie, "What's Love Got to Do With It," portrayed the relationship between Ike and Tina Turner as abusive before their breakup. It was also said to victimize Tina, as she shared in a 2018 interview with Oprah Winfrey. But Deon Releford-Lee, the actor who plays Ike in the Broadway musical, says there is more to Ike's story than is told on screen. In preparing for the part, the Broadway actor searched for the triggers that made Ike who he was known to be.

Celebrity Attractions presents "Tina, The Tina Turner Musical" from May 14 to May 19 at the Tulsa Performing Arts Center, 110 E. 2nd St. (Tickets are available online at tulsapac.com, by phone at (918) 596.7111, and at the box office.)

Ike is part of the musical until the breakup and the start of Tina's solo career in the second act. Because of the problematic themes of domestic violence, the musical is recommended for ages 14 and older.

Ike Turner

In an interview with The Oklahoma Eagle, Releford-Lee said playing Ike Turner was a healing experience for him. While "villains" have challenging roles, Releford-Lee said it is liberating in some respects, and he embraces the challenge.

"I have a wealth of knowledge of difficult things to play. My focus is to do as much...research as possible to figure out who this human was, what happened in his path, and what maybe led him to the places to do some of the horrible things he did. Not to excuse their behavior because it's deplorable, right? We don't just walk around hating people, throwing them around, forcing them, and manipulating them to do things," Releford-Lee said. He described Ike's aggressive behavior, especially with his wife.

Channeling that aggressive hyper-masculine energy takes a toll but also frees Releford-Lee to be softer, more feminine, more free, and more in touch with his emotions off-stage. Having played many villains in the past, he said he learned to become "Okay with my ugliness because that ugliness is in all of us."

"Ike was a black man who wrote music and was one of the fathers of rock 'n' roll but never received the credit," Releford-Lee said. As Tina took center stage and became the superstar she was, Ike was overlooked.

"Those are the things that I focus on to help ground me in the (character) because being rejected for being black, being talented, being othered, is something that I can connect to."

Tulsa Connections

In an article published in June 2023 following Tina's death, The Oklahoma Eagle Editor Gary Lee reflected on the days when the Ike and Tina Revue came to Tulsa and performed at the Big 10 Ballroom. The Ike and Tina Revue was a Big Ten headliner several times in the 1960s, and they performed together until their 1976 divorce.

Tulsa musician and radio personality Bobby Eaton Jr. knew them both and witnessed much of what was happening around them on the road. Eaton recently held a launch party for his new band, Eaton Out. During the performance, he recounted working with Ike and Tina Turner as the youngest guy in the band. Eaton said he appreciated Ike as a band leader, a musician/composer, and a businessman who showed him the ropes in the industry. But Eaton acknowledged that the relationship was not easy.

"Tina was there, and a lot of fights and a lot of crazy stuff went on back in those days, but at the same, I couldn't wait to get away because they had too much drama going on," Eaton recently told an audience at the launch party for his new group, The Eaton Out Band.

Singer Michelle Love, aka Sweet Randi Love, became an Ikette in 1993 and knew him during the last decade of his life when he revived his career as a frontman. She joined the band despite being familiar with the tumultuous relationship Tina described.

"We were more like a family unit. When it came to work, though, he was a real hard ass. I don't want to say it like that. But you know what I mean? He was serious when it came to work. As far as that goes, he didn't play any games because he was like, this is me on stage, and it represents me.



ZURIN VILLANUEVA performing as 'Tina Turner' and Garrett Turner as 'Ike Turner' in the North American touring production of TINA - THE TINA TURNER MUSICAL. PHOTO MATTHEW MURPHY FOR MURPHYMADE, 2022

"After the Tina stuff, Ike was self-conscious...about every little thing that he did because he had already gotten kind of a bad rap behind the movie. So, he was a real stickler as far as that goes," Love said, "But when it was time for everybody to go home and we were calming down, Ike was just a big old teddy bear. Honestly, he was really. I think a lot of what he went through, you know, in the past team as well, had a lot to do with his insecurities. During the Jim Crow days, he went through quite a bit. So, there's a lot that people don't know about him. As far as his background story goes, I'm not trying to take away from Tina's background story because she has a story to tell, but it might explain why he was the way he was."

Ike was released from prison in 1991 after serving 18 months for drug offenses. Cocaine was his drug of choice, and it flowed freely, in large quantities, around him. Ike's drug addiction relapse in 2004 led to his drug overdose in 2007.

Love has returned to Tulsa and continues to sing and perform with Sweet Randi Love and The Love Thang band.

About Deon Releford-Lee

Releford-Lee attended Fayetteville State University in North Carolina, an HBCU. At the university, he studied dance and theater. He began working professionally when he was still not old enough to play certain roles portraying more mature characters. Although getting attention was difficult, he worked his way from ensemble to lead roles. A move to New York City followed. That led to his current role as Ike.

Releford-Lee plays Ike full-time every night but has two understudy actors for this incredibly physical and emotional role. A self-described Bohemian, Releford-Lee's personality is very different from Ike's, and he is shocked when audience members have no idea who he is when the cast goes out to greet them.

Following a night onstage, he does breathwork to unwind and get out of character, which can take about 15 minutes to exit.

"I realized that when I'm feeling anxious, it's mostly because physically I'm not breathing at all. I'm holding my breath, so I'm just reminding myself to breathe. I'm someone who doesn't leave the theater right away. I just kind of sit there for a bit, take off my costume, take off my wig, put my jewelry on, put my own clothes back on, and just kind of sit and listen to music, and then move on."

Releford-Lee said people will learn a little more through Ike's backstory, how the industry treated him, and why he was the way he was.

"And in the same breath, you're also seeing him being manipulative and hurtful. And the audience is kind of on his side



DEON RELEFORD-LEE plays Ike Turner in the TPAC production TINA: The Tina Turner Musical.

in one second, and then the very next second, betrayed by him.

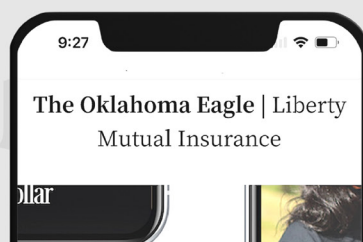
"I love the moment where Tina and Ike first meet because you see them laughing, you see them enjoying each other. It's one of the only times of fun between them. And I think that's beautiful. I love watching Tina discover herself in the second act."

Celebrity Attractions describes "Tina-The Tina Turner Musical" as the inspiring journey of a woman who broke barriers and became the Queen of Rock 'n' Roll. "Set to the pulse-pounding soundtrack of her most beloved hits, this electrifying sensation will send you soaring to the rafters." Tina Turner won 12 Grammy Awards and her live shows were seen by millions, with more concert tickets sold than any other solo performer in music history. Featuring her songs, "Tina-The Tina Turner Musical" is written by Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Katori Hall and directed by the internationally acclaimed Phyllida Lloyd.

KIMBERLY MARSH is a contributing writer at the Oklahoma Eagle. She is a native Oklahoman. Public education is one of her passions.

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LEGAL

IN THE DISTRICT COURT IN
AND FOR
TULSA COUNTY, STATE OF
OKLAHOMA

Publication dates:
5-10-24 and 5-17-24

IN THE MATTER
OF THE ESTATE OF
DAVID E. OFFORD, JR., Deceased

Case No. PB-2020-563
Judge Kurt G. Glassco

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All creditors having claims against
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Representative at:

Valerie J. Evans,
Attorney at Law
Post Office Box 692056,
Tulsa, OK 74169

on or before the following
presentation date: July 1, 2024, or
the same will be nonsuited, void and
forever barred.

DATED this 7th day of May 2024.

S/S Valerie J. Evans,
OBA No. 15606
Attorney for the Personal
Representative of the
Estate of David E. Offord, Jr.

P.O. Box 692056
Tulsa, OK 74169
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