

CURET Marks 25 Years Of Service To The Community



A section of the large gathering at CURET's 25th Anniversary Celebration in the Theater of the Artists Collective

By Stan Walker

The Center for Urban Research, Education and Training (CURET) located on Albany Avenue in Hartford, in the heart of the city's Caribbean American community, celebrated its 25th anniversary in style with a gala dinner reception, on Sunday, June 26, at the Artists Collective.

The full-house reception was also staged as a part of the 11th anniversary of the Caribbean

Heritage Month celebration.

Right from the start, Jim Daniels, a published author and independent writer, who delivered the invocation, lauded the visionary founders and leaders of the center Drs. Edgar and Carol Johnson for the outstanding work that they are doing in the community. He praised them for the way in which they brought up their children; one whom he said is a medical scientist. Describing the children as products

of discipline, Daniels presented the Johnsons with a book, which he said he had written about the family that they should find very interesting.

"Success of the institution would not have been possible without the efforts of the two Johnsons," he said.

On hand for the CURET celebration were U.S. Senator Richard Blumenthal, Hartford Mayor Luke Bronin, Bloomfield Deputy Mayor Syd Schulman, State

Representatives David Baram of Bloomfield, Ed Vargas, and Doug McCrory of Hartford; and Dr. Foye Smith, Hartford probate judge.

State Representative Edwin Vargas, commended the Johnsons for the wonderful work that they are doing, then read a congratulatory proclamation to them on behalf of the members of the Connecticut State legislators. This was followed by brief recognition addresses from Senator Richard

Blumenthal, and Hartford's Mayor Luke Bronin. Both praised the Johnsons for committing themselves to not only starting a program that is well needed in the community but also for doing work which they said is very inspirational.

"This celebration is an important opportunity to recognize generations of community advocates, who have helped CURET to reach this stunning milestone, while honoring the cultural contributions of Caribbean Americans in Connecticut," Senator Christopher Murphy said in a letter to the organizers of the program. As we celebrate the past 25 years, our minds turn to the vital and invaluable work CURET has done and continues to do for underserved populations in our state.

"CURET's impact is felt across communities helping to prepare adult learners for high school completion programs, assisting students' transition to college, bridging the cultural gap for immigrants and families who need community guidance to navigate academics, workforce involvement, and financial literacy," he said.

"Thank you for your consistent commitment to making a difference. Strong, community-minded champions like those gathered this evening are an important reminder of what our communities are capable of when we work together," Murphy said.

In his remarks, Capital Community College's (CCC) President Dr. Wilfredo Nieves noted the strong partnership between the College and CURET and how CURET's work

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Mayor's Town Hall Meeting: An Eye-Opener

By Edgar Johnson

Coincidentally, Hartford School Superintendent Beth Schiavino-Narvaez's announcement that Martin Luther King (MLK) Elementary School on the cutting block will remain open for another year came minutes before Mayor Luke Bronin's recent Town Hall meeting on North Hartford Schools at the Artists Collective, 1200 Albany Avenue, Hartford, CT.

Minutes before the meeting, there was a large crowd at the main entrance consisting of parents, students, business, clergy and community leaders. People had signs and banners, all chanting "Save our school! We voted you in and we will vote you out!"

As the crowd got larger and louder, people were engaged. "We are ready to fight," shouted

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Rev. Sam Sailor makes a point at the Town Meeting

In America Fragmentation Grows

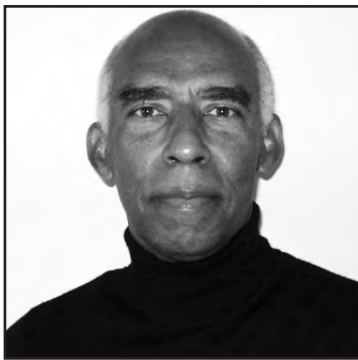
In his January 2006 State of the Union message, President George W. Bush presented one of his objectives—as was true of all his predecessors—to rally the nation behind his proposals with the hope for a unified, prosperous country. It's not likely to happen. In case you have not paid attention, this country has grown alarmingly fragmented over the past 10 years. The very approval of Judge Samuel Alito to the Supreme Court along very partisan political lines is but today's episode.

Recently, as I became more aware of this, I read an article by former MIT Professor Gary T. Marx that described what was taking place. In the 1950s and early 1960s, American society was criticized for its conformity and homogeneity. Authors such as William Whyte in *The Organization Man* (1956) required reading in humanities classes in the 1960s as was C. Wright Mills in *The Power Elite* (1956), lamented what they saw as the leveling and stifling effect of bureaucracy and conformity in mass society.

The individual, as these writers expressed it, described American society as overly responsive to the group and unduly timid. Nothing said this more loudly than the *Leave It To Beaver* episodes—the early TV 'sitcom' of the period that ran on network television from October 1957 to September 1963 and was a series both praised for stoking up family innocence and panned for its homogenized sappiness.

It was John F. Kennedy's charge that lit an emotional fuse of discontent with the way things were with his challenge to "ask not what your country-can do-for you, but what can you do for your country" that began the stirrings towards a greater sense of national unity that remained pretty much with us into the 1970s. But it was the 'greed is OK' mantra of junk bond king Michael Milken and others in the 1980s that I regard as the social watershed.

Here began the turning towards the balkanization and self-absorption by this country along very partisan and overly assertive



Jim Daniels

affinity groups and communities each having very narrow interests and concerns.

The resurgence of ethnicity and ethnic and religious diversity seem to contribute to difficulty for many of these groups to see themselves as real Americans while perpetuating the metaphorical myth of our culture as a garden salad as new groups from Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean grew in size and increased in isolation.

What has become of the

Kennedyesque challenge to our sense of national community? According to Marx, "It has been replaced by what is in some ways an opposite concern over the pronounced differences and indifference in contemporary society. (There is) worry that the tyranny of community has been replaced by worry over whether or not there is any community to begin with, or what kind of community it is." If we needed any timely and relevant examples, consider the issues that have arisen since hurricane Katrina unveiled the chasm between those who have and the disenfranchised poor black citizens of Louisiana.

Consider further the contribution the culture wars have made to this climate of divisiveness and partisanship; the strident voices on one side of an issue, and we are all called on to take sides, such as tax relief for the wealthy; patriotism; the campaigns for public office that now center on destroying the character of those in the contest and very little attention to

the substantive issues that just may improve our lives.

There are the differences between those who have access to health care and those who do not and the size of the group without insurance coverage. Consider further the issues of abortion and homosexuality that would lead an impartial observer to conclude that once these issues are "fixed" national bliss will descend.

Then there is the quintessential issue of the Iraq war. The public is coalescing on this and they will shortly raise their voices to a crescendo demanding that the invasion end. Look for a period of bitterness over the folly and the sacrifices paid that will only exacerbate the national mood of disconnectedness.

I have not even mentioned the perennial issue of Affirmative Action where there are those who believe that the color-blind society has been with us for some time and our flawed justice system. The list seems interminable. The differ-

ences in the educational opportunities between the predominantly white suburbs and the predominantly black and Hispanic urban areas and the consequences that flow from a lack of suitable preparation because of inadequate schools are but other examples.

Is there hope? Well, certainly not with the quality of our national and regional leadership. Corruption has become our new national industry and there is very little shame about it. The public seems inured to this national and regional stain on our character.

However, let's not despair, keep hope alive. The Psalmist said he was envious of the arrogant and the prosperity of the wicked. That is until he entered God's sanctuary and was shown their end. Pray for national unity under the banner of just and moral leadership.

(This column appeared in the February 2005 edition of this paper and is submitted to prompt examination of our current state of affairs).

Viewpoint

Should Presidential Candidates Be Battle Tested?

By Leon Fraser

Should the protocol for choosing a leader of the free world change? Should the president of the United States be battle tested? In the absence of a battlefield, should he/she be exposed to the trials and tribulations of a simulated battle in training or just regular boot camp?

Should the leader be consciously aware of the grit that it takes to endure an opponent in close encounters and to make the life or death decisions based on his or her life and not others?

We are now in the throes of choosing an individual to represent the entire 320 million residents of this country, and whether the presidential candidate knows it or not, there will be another global encounter where we (Americans) will be the center; why?

War is good business and drives profits, and the business owners put profits before people; that's just the way of capitalism and we lead the way in that at this point.

The requirements of becoming a president must be changed if the Commander in Chief is to be credible in his or her decisions for engaging another country in a physical conflict, which will decimate societies of their structures, citizens, and completely turn-around ways of life and living. Then the individual who has the

last word on these decisions must be battle tested. America is now at the threshold of its 45th presidency and so far has not endured another military conflict on American soil since the war of revolution.

The office of the president, the CEO of this country, is a coveted place. Many have died to get in it; some have died before they got to it; and some have died while in it.

Yet, in this modern era most of the individuals that seek to obtain the keys to the residence at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue have not sought to obtain a degree of training that would at least make their title as Commander in Chief as valid as their other training.

George Washington was Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army during his time; Zachary Taylor was a Major General, so he had the military pedigree that gave validity to his title. So too was Franklyn Pierce. Lincoln was not in the military; he was a lawyer by profession, but when he assumed the title of president he also became the Commander-in-Chief. Ulysses Grant was a commanding general, Eisenhower was a 5-star general, and so the title that is bestowed on the incumbent is an indication that the holder of the title has experience in that area.

Most jobs that folks apply for usually require some previous experience; in that regard president

of the USA does not. All it requires is that you are a citizen of the country by birth. Is that enough? What is the educational requirement? Should it be a bachelor, master, or a doctoral degree? Or in the absence of the previously mentioned, simply have the money to finance your electoral victory?

The use of technology has caused the shrinking of global activities so what happens in Kiribati is instantly known in a small district in Georgetown, Guyana, or on a small Island—one of the Bahamas' group of Islands.

So the importance and validity of the office holder of president is critical to the geo-politics of the world and not just a feather to be added to the cap of who sits in the office.

The current president would have been disqualified if military service were a requirement. However, he would have absolved himself of some of the uncertainties by his olive branch approach to some of the known adversaries of the lifestyles of this country, even though he has received harsh criticisms from individuals who have obviously never travelled out of this country with or without an entourage and seen and heard views of the USA from outside this country.

The method of choosing an individual to sit in the office of the president must be overhauled to

be consistent with 21st century applications. In a similar manner the right to bear arms nowadays is not the same as it was when there were homesteads established as a part of the manifest destiny, or when the Barbary Coast rule was the rule of the time. Should a military training component be added to the pre-requisite?

The current seekers of the office have generated some enthusiasm from the electorate of a particular party, and at the same time have caused some concern if a particular one has the codes for the "football."

In my view, the method of selection does need to be modified to include a bout of serious boot camp training for the ones seeking to gain the highest office in the land, along with his resume to me scrutinized by the electorate prior to enter the ring of competition.

In a similar manner that the resumes of individuals seeking an executive position in a non-profit organization are scrutinized by a group of qualified persons, in my view, the job of presidents needs to be vetted, just so that time and resources are not wasted in primaries, or worst wait until the end of one term to say bye, bye to the affluent lucky winner of the election.

America needs to use the method of selection that is advocated to other independent countries for their selection of leaders; can it not be done here?

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CURET Marks 25 Years Of Service

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complements the mission of the college to create access to higher education in the city.

Highlighted were two neighborhood- and campus-based projects—an adult education Transition to College Program and a popular, tuition-free collaborative Urban Farming Certificate program.

Instructor Bildade (Billie) Augustin and Continuing Education Coordinator Dan Gregory shared their reflections

on the CCC and CURET collaborations.

Nieves, board members and other speakers praised the Johnsons, the founders of CURET for their continuing leadership in the community. Dr. Carol Johnson is an alumna of Capital (formerly Greater Hartford Community College). Dr. Edgar Johnson is a board member emeritus of the College's Foundation & Advisory Council and previously served on the board of Hartford State Technical College that was consolidated with Capital in 1990.

One of the highlights of the celebration was the honoring of six individuals for the important roles that they are playing in helping with the development and growth of the institution.

Those who were honored and presented with plaques were Nora Brown, a certified and retired school administrator; Jerry Clapis, a communications specialist for CREC, and a Hartford Community Television volunteer; Dr. Linda Guzzo, dean of the School of Workforce and Continuing Education at Capital Community

College; Dr. Tina R. Jeter, director of the Adult Education Center in Hartford; Michael Scricco, teacher of Civic Design at the Hartford Art School (University of Hartford); and Dr. Fiona Vernal, associate professor of History and Africana Studies at the University of Connecticut.

Special *Beyond the Call of Duty Awards* were presented to Annie Lazarus, CURET's longest serving board member and Torre Shorter for her volunteerism in CURET's outreach and celebration event.

Video clips showed students giving reflections of how proud they were to have participated in the CURET and CCC programs were very moving and uplifting. Jennifer Farr, an alumna of CURET, spoke of how the program has helped her to reclaim her academic skills, and that CURET has helped her to get back on the road towards achieving her life-long dream of becoming a nurse that she is pursuing at CCC.

Another video dealt with the Urban Farming In Action program offered at CURET and CCC, followed an explanation by Dan Gregory, CCC program coordinator.

The gathering was also treated to some delightful entertaining performances from Wyshanta Perry, a CURET student, Caribbean American Dance Company, Sh'Dai Forrester, and singer Alexander Michelle.

CURET, a major Caribbean education service initiative in Connecticut, serves more than 1,500 clients annually, including the nurturing of more than 200 adults in Basic Education, GED and other high school completion options, and translation to college, preparation for opportunities to access apprenticeship, job and careers in the trades. CURET has also assisted some 2,000 individuals to become citizens of their adopted country.

Based on census and immigration data, Hartford is a city with one of the heaviest concentrations of Caribbean Americans residing in North America.

In marking CURET's quarter century of service, organizers said CURET with its Caribbean American Resource Center has become "one of Connecticut's major educational and community service initiatives since the founding of the oldest West Indian Social Club of Hartford that was established in 1950."

A Hearty Heartfelt "Thank You"

Many thanks to all who contributed to an unforgettable celebration—CURET's 25 Years and Beyond, Changing Lives for the Better!

Without your help, it would not have been possible to deliver such a high quality event.

Working together, you

were a magnificent team: *The Planning Team*: Mary Pinnock, Cynthia Solomon, Gloria Grant, Torre Shorter, Judith Green, Louis Ruddock, Anthony Sasser, Precious Ross-Ellis, Gretchen Johnson, Joette Johnson; *Performers*: Jose Camacho and his group, Asah Jackson, Alexander Michelle, Judith

Williams and the Caribbean American Dance Company, Sh'Dai Forrester; Wyshanta Perry; *Presenters*: CURET Boy Scouts and Scout Leaders of Troop 1443, Marcia Esson, Isalena Gilzene and Veronica Airey-Wilson, mistress of ceremonies, Jim Daniels for the invocation and support; Bildade Augustin, Jennifer Farr, Dan Gregory; members of CURET's Board of Directors; Elder Basil Powell for the benediction; *Donated Works of Art*: Jeffrey Slobodien; *Other Volunteers*: Mark Bailey, Christopher Service, Annie Lazarus, Jennifer Stephens, Ashleigh Watkins, Dr. Godfred Ansah, Dr. Thomas Aldridge; *Videographer*: Jerry Clapis; *Photographer*: Odell

Powell; *Writer*: Stan Walker; *Caterer*: Anthony All Season; *Host of the Event*: Yvonne Harris of the Artist Collective; businesses and vendors who contributed items and services for the silent auction.

Also, thanks to all who contributed to our fundraising efforts in support of CURET's offering educational, civic engagement and citizenship education, cultural, and socio-economic services to countless individuals—children, adults, families, the newly arriving and the long-ago immigrants, as well as native born.

Thanks to CURET's partners and collaborators, other service providers, agencies and organizations.

As I See It: Freedom Isn't Free



Christopher A. Service Sr.

Freedom is sometimes defined in three ways: the quality or state of being free; deliverance from confinement or bondage; the quality or state of being free, especially to enjoy political and civil liberties. Those definitions are relative. As I see it, freedom isn't free: "... free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty, we are free at last..." These words are attributed to the late Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

The late Daniel Defoe, a British author said, "... nature hath put a tincture in our blood that each man would be a tyrant if he could..."

Implicit in both of the above quotations is the theme "freedom" or lack thereof. A look at the basic unit of society—the family—reveals that there are restrictions. The head of the family outlines certain 'dos and don'ts' that other family members are required to follow. The thinking is that if the family members follow those guidelines there will be harmony and order in the home. From the outset, therefore, there are restrictions.

The aforementioned head of family also has restrictions placed on him or her by society. The idea behind those restrictions is conformity to societal norms and mores. What we get, therefore, are restrictions such as: don't walk, don't talk, speak softly, don't smoke, don't swear, and possibly a million other don'ts.

Each individual goes about his or her daily activities cognizant of the fact that restrictions are a way of life. Therefore, one could argue that freedom is a myth.

Many years ago I went

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into a certain business establishment where I saw a sign, which read '... if you spit on the floor at home, spit here and feel at home.' That caused a chuckle but what the owner of that establishment was saying, although subtly is, don't spit here.

One might say that I am trivializing the concept of freedom but shouldn't one be able to do whatever one wishes to do without being restricted? Shouldn't one, when driving, be able to stop in the middle of the road and speak to a friend even though there are other drivers wanting to get by. Or, shouldn't a young man be able to wear his pants down to his knees without being ostracized. Or, shouldn't a visitor to a church be able to sit in whatever pew he or she wants without getting a 'dirty look' from

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Scenes From CURET’s 25th Anniversary Celebration



Representatives Doug McCrory and Edwin Vargas present citation from Connecticut State Legislators



Dr. Foye Smith, Hartford probate judge greets the gathering, recognizing CURET’s milestone.



College Instructor, Isalena Gilzene, mistress of ceremony at the event, engages the audience



Dr. Wilfredo Nieves, president of Capital Community College, addresses the gathering



Jim Daniels offers the invocation and addresses the gathering



Members of the Caribbean American Dance Company in a spectacular performance, energizing the audience



Sen. Richard Blumenthal addresses the gathering. In the foreground are Writers Jim Daniels and Stan Walker of *The West Indian American*



Solo Dancer Wyshanta Perry wows the audience with her rendition of “Incredible God.”



Alexander Michelle in sensational performance, offering a medley of selections



Sh'Dai Forrester uplifts the audience with her fantastic rendition of "You Raise Me Up"



Jennifer Farr, CURET Alumna, shares her very emotive story



Hartford Mayor Luke Bronin addresses the gathering



Bildade Augustin, CCC instructor, Transition to College, shares experience instructing and nurturing students in the program



Annie Lazarus, member of CURET's Board of Directors, acknowledged for years of service, dedication and commitment to CURET and its mission



Veronica Airey-Wilson presents honoree Nora Brown, noting her years of commitment and dedication to instructing and nurturing students in CURET's Adult Education Program



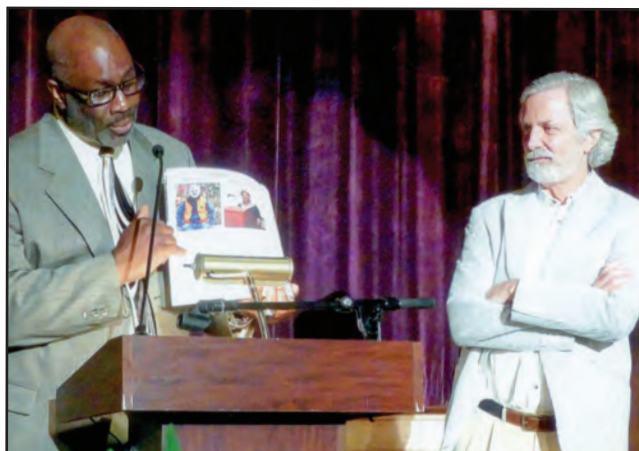
Carol Johnson presents Honoree Jerry Clapis with award for his many years of Outstanding Service, dedication and commitment to CURET's development, most recently his artful videographic presentation at the celebration



Dr. Godfred Ansah, CURET Board member, presents Dr. Linda Guzzo, dean of CCC, with award for Outstanding Service and Partnership with initiatives at CURET.



Carol Johnson presents honoree Dr. Tina Jeter, director, Adult Education Center, with award for Outstanding Service and Partnership at CURET.



Dr. Thomas Aldridge, CURET Board member, presents Michael Scricco, teacher, Civic Design, Hartford Art School (University of Hartford), with Outstanding Service Award.



Dr. Fiona Vernal responds to award presented by Veronica Airey-Wilson, for Outstanding Service and Support at CURET



Dr. Edgar Johnson presents Torre Shorter with *Beyond the Call of Duty* Award for her volunteerism in CURET's outreach and celebration event.



Some members of the Planning Committee (from left): Cynthia Solomon, Gloria Grant, Precious Ross, Ellis Jennifer Stephens, Mark Bailey, Louis Ruddock, and Joette Johnson.



CURET students throughout the audience were asked to stand and be recognized. Shown (standing, from left) are: GED-Transition to College students Natasha Williams, Micolé Lyons, and Raheem Hamilton



CCC representatives (from left): John McNamara, Dan Gregory, and Jo-Anne Leventhal



Mayor Luke Bronin connects with Mr. & Mrs. Basil Powell



Members of the Caribbean American Dance Company in performance with a stunning selection, "Many Rivers to Cross," making real the many challenges adults face as they pursue their education ambitions.

UConn Scholars Housing, Exactly What Young Black Men Need To Succeed

At the University of Connecticut (UConn), only 55% of African American male undergraduate students successfully earn their degree within six years. As a state, we should be deeply embarrassed by this statistic. We must ask ourselves: In what ways are we failing our young black men?

I applaud UConn for bringing to fruition the Scholars House, a learning community geared toward first- and second-year African American male students. This occurred despite the misguided outrage and political sniping. Scholars House, short for Scholastic House Of Leaders who are African American Researchers & Scholars, will open this fall with 43 students. These sort of forward-thinking initiatives are exactly what will help young black men succeed, at college and beyond.

The learning community aims to improve the alarmingly low graduation rates of black male students at UConn, offering these students a housing option that provides academic support, access to research opportunities, and professional development.

Scholars House’s strategy



Rep. Doug McCrory

of providing black male students with mentoring and a built-in peer support network does not sound particularly revolutionary. In fact, its goals seem similar to that of an already established learning community for women in STEM fields. But you wouldn’t know that based on backlash that has at times reached a level of hysteria.

An article recently published by conservative news site the *Daily Caller* screeches, “This Taxpayer-Funded University Is LITERALLY Building A Segregated

Dorm.” Though that may be the height of the hyperbole, concerns about segregation and a ‘black-only’ dorm abound.

Unlike the *Daily Caller*, many critics who have voiced this concern appear to be well intentioned. That doesn’t change the fact that their argument is rooted in an age-old racist sentiment – that people of color who choose to associate with people of their own race are, in fact, committing an act of racism. That most white people associate largely with other white people usually goes conveniently unmentioned.

Being the minority in any situation can be difficult – being the minority all the time can be exhausting. Whether it’s casually racist comments from a classmate or being asked to speak on behalf of *all* black people, students of color must navigate social situations that others simply do not. To argue that a reprieve from their minority status and a chance to seek the support of other black men is unnecessary or bigoted denies that racism is still a driving force in our society.

Out of approximately 18,800 undergraduate students at the Storrs campus, only 450 are black males, making them the smallest of any demographic group divided along race or gender lines. Particularly for students who come from more diverse high schools, entering a world of mostly white classrooms and dormitories can be daunting.

Providing structured support from their peers and successful black academics is a promising strategy for decreasing the social isolation black male students experience and keeping them in school. Bravo to UConn for attempting a different

solution to an entrenched problem. The larger goal of racial equity is worth some raised eyebrows.

(Douglas McCrory is a State Representative for Hartford and a Vice Principal at CREC Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts.).

Freedom

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mister or miss so and so who is a member of the church with a special seat?

Non-conformity to certain ‘rules and regulations’ in society can cause individuals to be incarcerated. During the period of incarceration there are rules that have to be followed, or the individuals will have to deal with the consequences. When the same set of individuals are released from incarceration there are certain guidelines that must be ‘complied’ with.

Any action that subtly or blatantly is designed to dehumanize and discredit human beings should be discouraged.

Freedom isn’t free. For the orderly running of society there must be restrictions, checks, and balances. Rightly understood, freedom should be a universal license to do good. That is as I see it!

Community Event

Annual Golf Tournament

The 10th Annual Dr. Roy A. Kellerman Invitational Golf Tournament at Wintonbury Hills Golf Course will take place on Friday, September 9, 2016 in Bloomfield, CT. The event will include a silent auction, awards, and dinner. Proceeds from the tournament will benefit Bethesda Medical Mission; House of Mercy Orphanage in Haiti; Mobile Clinic in Haiti; Hartford Area SDA School; and free health screenings in the Greater Hartford area.

The Bethesda Medical Mission (BMM), Inc. is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization committed to serving individuals, providing free compassionate medical and dental care to those in the local community and in the mission field. BMM also assists in the education and socio-economic development of global citizens who are less fortunate. Monetary and in-kind donations will be accepted through Friday, September 2, 2016. Checks can be made payable to Bethesda Medical Mission and mailed to: 701 Cottage Grove Road, Suite A-110, Bloomfield, CT 06002, or online at www.bethesdamedicalmission.com. Please include “Golf Tournament” in the memo line of your check.

For additional information about the mission and/or questions regarding the details of your donation, please call (860) 243-5569; email: bethesdamedmission@gmail.com; fax: (860) 243-2622.

God Is Good Ministries of Dr. Jewel Miller

“Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God Almighty which was and is, and is to come” (Rev. 4:8b). **Community Service Awards for Leadership** to individuals with decades of **Outstanding, Immutable Service and Dedication** to their communities, most importantly serving the Lord with gladness: George Amos, Donna Ann B. Long; Lew Brown; Public Intellectual Alphonzo McGriff; Lorene Y. Williams; Dr. M. Rick Turner, president, Charlottesville, VA, NAACP

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Mayor's Town Hall Meeting

Continued from Page 1

one lady. Community Organizer, Rev AJ Johnson interrupted and called on the crowd for a moment of silence as he made an announcement, reading a statement from Superintendent Narvaez, that MLK School will remain open for another year until a plan has been worked out. This was followed with loud applause and rejoicing.

"This is a long, long process but it's not over," Johnson said. According to him, the announcement came not only by the good will of Mayor Bronin but all the folks who came out, parents, students and community partners.

Some 350 students were slated to move to Fox Middle School basement which has no windows; mold in the ceiling and inadequate bathrooms.

Kudos, to Mayor Bronin who was proactive in doing his own fact-finding tours of the MLK and the Fox Middle School buildings.

So the announcement not to move MLK students to Fox Middle for the next school year until a plan has been worked out was an exercise of great wisdom. The announcement calmed the people as they entered the atrium for the Mayor's Town Hall meeting on North Hartford Schools, particularly, MLK School.

Started out rather bluntly, Mayor Bronin outlined some of the issues facing North Hartford schools, particularly MLK School. What has led to the uncertainties and the bigger issue? "What is the future of MLK School?"

"Our school is under enrolled and there are lots of reasons for the enrollment challenges," Bronin said. The evidences are clear. Mandate to create the majority of the inter-district Magnet School system and spending the state's \$3 billion to integrate public education in the Hartford area in order to align with the settlement in the Sheff vs. O'Neil desegregation court case

Clearly, the state went wild in creating lots of magnet schools without an overarching strategic plan. Each new Magnet school built and more Open Choice opportunities had a good recruiting and marketing campaign, attracting and funneling students out of the Hartford public schools to those schools, robbing

Peter to pay Paul.

Everything was made appealing, new facilities and resources to attract parents to send their kids out of their neighborhood schools. Some teachers even boasted how they have all the resources to help their students excel.

At the same time everything is old and dilapidated in the neighborhood and community schools; meager resources and no support personnel; and in MLK School in particular, the gifted and talented are funneled out of the school; as teachers work with students and reinforce certain skills, pushing them to the next level, they too are funneled out of the school to a Magnet school.

It is not surprising that when the situation reached rock bottom, Bruce Douglas, former Magnet School creator of the Capitol Region Education Council (CREC) for some 18 years, put out a warning soon after he retired: "There are too many Magnets now." In his tenure at CREC since 1998, Douglas opened 16 new Magnet Schools.

"Every time you build a Magnet school, you take children out of the Hartford public schools. Every time you engage in Open Choice, you're taking children out of the Hartford public schools," Douglas said. "I think we have to be careful that we don't empty out the Hartford public schools, he added.

Douglas said that in the long run at the rate in which the state was moving in building new magnet schools without a shared vision and a strategic plan will hurt public education in Hartford. North Hartford schools now feeling the brunt of the state mandate creating new magnet seats to meet Sheff integration targets.

And the funneling of Hartford Public School students by Magnet Schools and Open Choice results in Hartford Public schools facing enrollment crisis and school closure.

This is a sure fulfillment of prophecy. For example, MLK School is on the closing block. But closing public schools in Hartford's poorest neighborhoods is not the best solution. Why not invest the money that is targeted for new magnet schools in revitalizing Hartford schools and neighborhoods instead?

Make them the best schools, provide them with the best resources, recruit the best teachers, outreach family educators to work with families, starting as early as the



A large group of organizers gather outside before the Town Hall Meeting

pre-K through Middle school with a targeted curriculum that taps into the self understanding and cultural identity of these students, giving them hope, support, resources, and reason to succeed. Schools are dealing with real lives whose futures are at stake.

They are more than bricks and mortar. They deserve a good education, giving stability to families, neighborhoods and the socio-economic of the city's workforce, all contributing to society.

One could feel the passion and heavy burden as parents and community leaders lined up and shared their concerns at the Mayor's Town Hall meeting.

Speakers after speakers spoke about the struggles they were experiencing with the lack of adequate resources made available to their neighborhood schools.

Many said they were tired and frustrated concerning the lack of transparency among school officials and are crying out for inclusion. Parents don't have a voice and now they are organizing and demanding a voice and their input.

"I am passionate about education and people who are making decisions for us are not part of our neighborhood. I am tired of the struggles," said Christine. "It appears as if every school in the North End is being targeted. As a taxpayer, all we want is a strong community school in our community," said Precious Ellis – "Why do I have to wake up at 5AM sending my

grandchild to attend an Open Choice School?" she asked.

One of the issues that drew strong discussion concerned the people who make up the Superintendent Education Equity Committee – are they members of the community? How are decisions made? People on this Equity Committee do not understand our community issues and cannot speak for us. We have to be a part of the process. This was the consensus of the group.

There is no doubt that Hartford Mayor Bronin's Town Hall meeting was very engaging – attendees had lots of pent-up energy and concerns around Education – the future of MLK School and the funneling of the students to Magnet Schools and Open Choice drainage, resulting in critical enrollment challenges.

Stakeholders underscored the importance of a good quality neighborhood school in their community. One that is worthy of all costs and investments. Besides important issues around the Hartford

Board of Education Equity Committee and that the New Weaver School Construction project, there was a constant outcry for inclusion among attendees. Some said they were tired of the feelings of hopelessness and abandonment.

"I have seen how the negative triggers school dropouts, drugs and violent crimes, and leading to the pipeline of incarceration, resulting in lost opportunities and access," said an attendee.

People are tired of folks outside of their community, coming and deciding what is best for their kids. One asked, "How long will we subject our kids to this guinea pig experiment?" A few get help but the majority are left far behind, unable to access opportunities when they knock at their doors.

None of our kids should be left behind. Our goal is to ensure that we have a strong neighborhood school and that all the kids succeed, was the consensus of many as they left the meeting.

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New Urban Farming Class To Begin

By Dan Gregory

Capital Community College (CCC), in partnership with CURET and Hartford Food System, is proud to announce the second offering of the Certificate Program in Urban Farming, beginning on August 1. This program teaches students the skills necessary for growing food in the city and managing a successful urban farm operation. Graduates of the Urban Farming Certificate course will gain knowledge and skills to run small farms, and may gain work at existing enterprises involved in local food production.

The course will cover the technical aspects of farming, including botany, soil science, composting, and plant families as well as the business aspects of farming, including starting a farm, planning, and budgeting. Topics such as how to access and assess land, raising animals, and value-added products will also be covered. The course will have a focus on urban, small-scale, and organic farming. In addition to the classroom hours, students are also expected to complete a minimum of 2 hours per week of lab work at Grow Hartford urban farm. These guided lessons will provide hands-on training for students by gaining experience on a working urban farm in Hartford.

This program returns after a successful pilot year in 2015. One participant wrote about the last year's program, "I learned how to plant, how to take care of my health, and how to improve myself and my family by training my grandchildren how to farm and be industrious, healthy, and wise." Several students in last year's program built on their experiences by starting or expanding



Vans Harper and Derrick Henry, participants of the 2015 Class, with bountiful crop at reaping time



Derrick Bedward, a participant of the 2015 Class, grows a wide array of vegetables and herbs with a Caribbean flare

their growing of fresh food in the city.

Anwar Ahmad developed a business plan for Your Yard Envest Services (YYES), with the goal of unlocking the potential to grow food in Hartford residents' back yards. He brings the knowledge and experience he learned in the Urban Farming program to his community garden plot at Battles Street Community Garden, where he has encouraged 12 neighbors to join him at no cost for seeds, plants, and tools. Another student, Derrick Bedward, built on his farming experience and is developing a small

farm operation at Knox's incubator farm project, the Hartford Grown Headquarters, on Laurel Street.

Classes will be held on Mondays and Wednesdays from 6-8 pm at Capital Community College beginning on August 1. All skill levels are welcome, from backyard gardeners to those who want to further advance their farming skills. This is a SNAP-ET approved program and those who are currently enrolled in SNAP (Food Stamps) are encouraged to apply. For additional information on how to apply to the program, please contact Dan Gregory at dgregory@capitalcc.edu or 860-906-5138 before July 28.

Caribbean Tidbits

Jamaican now top executive at Home Depot

Ann-Marie Campbell, 50, has been appointed as the top executive in charge of all Home Depot stores in the United States. Campbell, a native of Jamaica, was born in Kingston. Before being named to her new position, she was in charge of the company's southern division, which comprises some 690 Home Depot stores in 15 states, Puerto Rico, and the US Virgin Islands. Campbell who graduated from Georgia State University with a degree in philosophy and an MBA began her career with the company as a cashier. In 2014 she was named to Fortune's list of the 40 Most Powerful Women in Business. In her new post at Home Depot, Campbell will oversee almost 400,000 employees in 2,000 stores. * * *

Samuels files lawsuit against former Aussie pace bowler

Jamaica and West Indies cricketer Marlon Samuels confirmed that he has filed a defamation case against former Australia fast bowler Geoff Lawson for alleged malicious comments during a radio show in April, 2016. The 35-year-old Samuels told Jamaica's OBSERVER ONLINE that the suit was filed, but he declined further comment. Lawson, 58, had reportedly said Samuels is "tied up with gangs" and "shady people" in the West Indies. Lawson's comments were said to have been made a day after West Indies beat England in a

dramatic final to lift the 2016 ICC World Twenty20 crown in India. Samuels made a man-of-the-match unbeaten half century in the match. * * *

Guyana, Jamaica committed to strengthened trade relations

President David Granger and Jamaica Prime Minister Andrew Holness have committed to strengthening trade relations between the two nations. During a meeting at the Pegasus Hotel recently, they held discussions on areas of agriculture, manufacturing and tourism, and deepened cooperation in defense and security, a release from the Guyana Ministry of the Presidency noted. Saying he looks forward to strengthened relations with Jamaica, President Granger has pointed out that as founding nations of CARICOM, Guyana and Jamaica have a role to play in further strengthening the alliance of the regional body. * * *

Bank of America to sever ties with Guyanese banks

Guyana's Central Bank Governor Dr. Gobind Ganga has confirmed that US bank — Bank of America has indicated that it will be severing ties with local banks in Guyana as early as next month. However, Ganga says the pullout may not have any implications for the country, as other banks from North America and Europe have already expressed an interest in filling the void. According to Ganga, only a few of the indigenous banks are affected and the reasons for severing ties were few. Banks in Guyana has depended on Bank of America to allow for the smooth flow of transactions between Guyana and North America. * * *

Dominicans fined for overstaying, fraud after hotel raid

Six citizens of the Dominican Republic who were removed from the Rio Night Club/Inn in Guyana were Monday, July 18, ordered to pay fines of \$50,000 each after they pleaded guilty to overstaying their time in Guyana and forging work permits. The women all of whom are over the age of 18, appeared before Chief Magistrate Ann McLennan, in the Georgetown Magistrates' Court, accompanied by their attorney. Between February 22 and July 14, the women overstayed their time in Guyana. * * *

Trinidad promises better treatment for Jamaicans at airport

Trinidad has made several promises to Jamaica in an attempt to quell immigration tensions between the two countries including training for immigration officers and a faster return of travelers back to their home country if they're denied entry. There is to be a review of the legislation and the protocols with regard to immigration. Jamaica's Foreign Affairs Minister Kamina Johnson-Smith announced at a joint press conference with Foreign and CARICOM. * * *

Barbados hosts regional talks on health and the law

Legal and health officials from around the region met in Barbados to discuss issues surrounding health-related law. The meeting got underway at the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) headquarters in Marine Gardens, Hastings, Christ Church, Barbados. Among those in attendance was Attorney General Adriel Brathwaite who gave brief remarks on the importance of addressing matters such as brain death legislation and the legalization of marijuana.

Guyana Kaiteur Group Celebrates 20th Anniversary

By Stan Walker

This year's Guyana Kaiteur Group's annual Scholarships Award Banquet was very special. Not only because the group celebrated its 20th anniversary but also the Golden Jubilee Anniversary of members' native country, the Co-operative Republic of Guyana's independence from Great Britain.

Held at the Hilton Hotel downtown



Scholarship recipients, from left: Elvan Coleman, Zoni Williams, Tonya Gray, and Rayquan Roberts

Hartford on Saturday, June 18, the more than 200 patrons who showed up at the event, cheered on the four deserving scholarship recipients, which President Grantley S. Adams in his welcoming address said made him extremely proud as it was the 85th scholarships that they have given out since their existence.

The gathering also enjoyed the performances of the country's premier Chutney, Soca and Reggae singer and musician Terry Gajraj and the versatile and energetic Ninja Band International, out of Brooklyn, New York, which kept them on the floor dancing throughout the entire celebration.

Adams read portions of the congratulatory message of Guyana's president David Granger, who said that the cel-

ebration of their 50th anniversary as an independent nation is truly momentous and joyous.

The observance of this Golden Jubilee is an opportunity to meditate on the lessons of our experiences of nationhood to celebrate our achievements, to contemplate the destiny of future generations, to continue our mission and to create a good life for all our people," he added. Guyana gained its independence on May 26, 1966.

Recalling how he participated in the celebrations when the country achieved independence, Adams, who was a high school student at the time, said that it was a time of joy and hope for our new nation.

"As we embark on our next 20 years, we look forward

ward to the involvement and contributions of the next generation of Guyana Kaiteur Group members who will succeed us and bring their youthful vigor and creative energies to ensure that future progeny continue to achieve success through education," Adams stated.

The scholarship recipients were Tonya Gray, a graduate of Hartford Culinary Arts Academy of Weaver High School, Elvon Coleman, who graduated from Middletown High School; Rayquan Roberts, a graduate of East Hartford High School; and Zari A. Williams who graduated from Windsor High School.

Gray, who has ambitions of becoming a doctor, intends to pursue studies in biological science, at the University of Connecticut. Coleman will be going to Curry College with intentions of seeking a degree in psychology. Roberts, plans to study manufacturing at Asnuntuck Community College, while Williams, will be pursuing studies in nursing at Southern Connecticut State University.

Vice President Forbes Cummings, who presented the students with the scholarship awards, congratulated them for their achievements. "We would like you to stay focus in your studies. Don't give up. Go forward and make your parents proud," he challenged them.



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