

# The West.Indian American

Serving the Caribbean/American Communities of Connecticut

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Celebrating National Women's History Month

MARCH 2021



Mark Milward

March is National Women's History Month. Given that women make history year-round, a question is justly raised: Why March? A bit of the historical context is helpful.

Briefly, Women's History Month emerged out of recognizing the contributions of women to events in history and contemporary, and has taken various shapes and forms since 1911. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, two significant women's suffrage events occurred in March. The first major suffragist parade occurred in Washington, DC on March 1913, and the National Women's Party, a political group dedicated to women's suffrage, was officially formed in March 1917.

National Women's History Month is observed in March in the USA, UK and Australia, and October in Canada when the official recognition occurred on March 8, 1911—a single day. On March 8, 2017, a movement in Australia stimulated women to participate in a rally for International Women's Day.

The popular movement led to women lobbying for a more formal observance of recognitions and accomplishments of women. In 1980, President Jimmy Carter designated the first official National Women's History Week on March 8 of that year.

This year, in recognizing National Women's History Month the spotlight shines on a native of Bloomfield, CT, on one who is not known for fanfares and drawing attention to herself; rather, she is a mission- and service-driven leader in her profession of choice.

Dr. Crista Johnson-Agbakwu is an obstetrician/gynecologist at Valleywise Health Medical Center in Phoenix Arizona and founding director of the Refugee Women's Health Clinic (RWHC), which she established at the medical center in 2008.

Johnson-Agbakwu is a research associate professor at Arizona State University and associ-

## Bloomfield, CT Native On The World Stage, Leading In Women's Sexual Health

ate professor in Health Sciences, Obstetrics and Gynecology at the satellite campus of Creighton University School of Medicine, where she also serves as a clinician educator.

To label Johnson-Agbakwu as a superstar service provider in women's sexual health would not be an overstatement. Her work in this field has been extensive, leading her to numerous awards and recognitions for her pioneering efforts to drive solutions toward women's sexual health.

Her groundbreaking research and studies in women's sexual health began during her senior year in college when she took a history course on women in pre-colonial Africa. This led to a project on female genital mutilation (FGM). Years later, in medical school while working with a New York-based organization, she again encountered FGM when she cared for African

women arriving in the U.S. and who were subjected to this practice at an early age, many of whom had developed complications as a result of FGM practice.

That experience helped her to reach the decision on the area to specialize as a physician. "That solidified my desire to pursue gynecology as a career, and to learn more about genital cutting from a public health perspective," she said.

Johnson-Agbakwu acknowledges a mentor, Dr. Claudia L. Thomas, who was practicing medicine at Johns Hopkins University (JHU) during the time of Johnson-Agbakwu's under grad years at JHU.

"Dr. Thomas, the first African American female orthopedic surgeon in the U.S, her legacy has been her staunch, lifelong commitment and advocacy focused on increasing the representation of people of color in medicine. Dr. Thomas inspired me to pursue a

career in health care leadership and health policy in order to have a 'seat at the table' where health care decisions are being made at the population level, with potential impacts on entire communities of color," Johnson-Agbakwu said.

Now, with over 25 years practicing medicine focusing on Women's Sexual Health, Johnson-Agbakwu is a world leader and a highly sought-after speaker on women's sexual health. She is a Fellow of the International Society for the Study of Women's Sexual Health (ISSWSH), and served as the Online Services chair from 2011–2015.

The 1992 Bloomfield, CT High School graduate earned her bachelor's degree in Biology from Johns Hopkins University; Medical degree from Weill Medical College of Cornell University; Residency in Obstetrics & Gynecology at George Washington University Medical

Center, Inova Fairfax Hospital, Virginia, and Holy Cross Hospital, Maryland; Master of Science degree in Health and Health Care Research from the University of Michigan Horace H. Rackham School of Graduate Studies, Ann Arbor, MI; postdoctoral training and fellowship, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Clinical Scholar, University of Michigan Medical School; Female Sexual Medicine Clinical Fellow, Female Sexual Medicine Center, Department of Urology, David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA.

Awards she has received include: 50 Distinguished Sexual and Gender Health Revolutionaries Award, Jacque Steiner Public Leadership Award, ACOG CREOG National Faculty Award for Excellence in Residence Education, Arizona Business Journal Health Care Leadership award, as well as Health Care Heroes Awards, and the State of Arizona Community Luminary Award.

Johnson-Agbakwu has travelled extensively throughout Africa. The state of Arizona has a high influx of refugees/immigrants from Sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East. Johnson-Agbakwu established the Refugee Women's Health Clinic (RWHC) nearly 13 years ago to care for vulnerable and underserved populations, particularly refugee communities.

The Clinic is the first of its kind in Arizona and recognized nationally by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) as a best practice model of care in advancing health equity for refugee women.

The RWHC has cared for over 9,000 women from 64 countries speaking 62 languages and has delivered over 2,000 newborns. She also conducts workshops and trains other doctors and health care providers in providing solutions from complications in sexual health and female genital cutting.

Johnson-Agbakwu attributes her success, drive and inspiration to her parents, both of whom have earned doctoral degrees. She recalls her years in the Greater Hartford area and times at the West Indian/Caribbean festivities in the area as eventful and fulfilling. Now a fixture in the Arizona medical community, she continues to be a much needed and much appreciated champion in women's health.



Dr. Crista Johnson-Agbakwu



Leon Fraser

## Women, The Threads Of Our Social Fabric

No society can exist or have ever existed, that we know of, without the presence of women who we all know are the threads of our social fabric and encapsulate the individual characteristics of genetics and community, giving counsel and solace to partners and off springs in a true maternal manner, which in turn makes any society progressive and productive.

Narratives of the past have consistently shown that the patriarchal methods of governance that have been the hallmark of western powers, is slowly coming to a gradual halt, especially since the pages of the past are now being written and scrutinized by the persons that were absent from most of those pages—women, women of substance

As the first teachers and the first models of a certain behaviors for all species, the mother is the goddess of life and there is no dispute to that enormous responsibility.

To emerge from the dark unspoken passages of the unspoken chapter in this country's coming to the fore, the women of African descent have risen to the challenge, and being prepared for this arduous

tasks, they have consistently demonstrated the quality needed to be constantly on point whether the circumstances are comfortable or not, and whether people wish to hear of it or not.

So, I give thanks to my mother who endured my irritation for the first months of life to early teen. I give thanks for my wife and daughter

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## Women

*Continued from Page 1*

that remind me constantly of the unique power of women: women in corporations and have to endure disrespects in varied settings, all the women who have to constantly advocate for similar conditions as their male counterparts in any industry, all the women that made strides in the disciplines said to be un-lady-like, especially the vocational skills, or the telecom circles of the rooms in silicon valley.

The accomplishments of women of Afro-centric ethnicity were not made to pass on and highlight facts as if accomplished by someone else from a different genetic genome, and with the express purpose of diluting the stories of dark-skinned people so as to perpetuate the big lie and become insensitive to the plight of the dehumanizing tendrils of prejudicial tendencies.

The great queens of the Nile and the African continent have led and dominated cities beyond current comprehension, have been instrumental in keeping Alexander the great within certain confines of his conquests, have been instrumental in deciding the outcome of the USA civil war acting as double agents, have given us numerous amenities to enhance the quality of life, ease of life and a better quality life, especially with hair styles, fashion, communication, and much more.

To take on the one-day recognition of women during the month of March is such a misnomer, because women should be recognized and celebrated, always!

Our current Vice President, Kamala Harris, a former first Lady; political appointees and elected representatives; law makers, in academia, medicine, sports, media, finance, and all the different strata that they have coordinated and assimilated so as to be in such a

position of power across the board, it is truly a pleasure to behold, knowing that there is very little that can be done to reverse such a case of osmosis is pure joy.

The next big thing to achieve is for little girls that look like some of the women pacesetters, trailblazers, and role models to see themselves in books and in reference materials for them to emulate and break away from the old teaching dogma that did not have representation like them in those pages.

As is becoming the now popular phrase, "If you can see her you, can be her." It simply states a fact that all these years our sisters, mothers, and daughters did not have positive images to emulate. That has changed. I am eternally grateful to the gender-specific-assigned female that enabled my presence on this planet, and to all the true females that celebrate that specific assignment, I thank you; I love you all.

## AEC And CURET, Partners In Adult Education

By Carol Johnson

Education is fundamental to success for children, adults, and a vital foundation for personal wellbeing, social and economic mobility, and there are all the benefits. At times, due to life's circumstances, many individuals or a population have had their early years of formal or traditional schooling truncated. Later in life, many try to return to school as adults.

In fact, Adult Education has been an important part of the education system in the United States. First, states took the lead in Adult Education, followed by the first federal legislation passed in 1964, working with states to continue expanding opportunities for adults who wish to further their learning. Adult Education is a vital response that enables individuals to keep up with an ever-advancing technological world.

Whether continuing education means improving English, completing a GED program, or learning a new skill, upgrading education helps adult learners gain the skills they need to be successful in contemporary society.

According to the U.S. Census 12% of the U.S. adult population does not have a high school credential. Adult educational systems cover a wide spectrum, adapting to the changing times and needs of the population, a means for adults who fell through education cracks during their early schooling years, or made a wrong turn along the way to get a second chance at improving their lives.

Adult students may fall into different categories—immigrants or American-born individuals—choosing to update a current skill or learn a new skill. People continue their education during many stages of their lives: while employed, unemployed, on public assistance, in correctional facilities or other institutions, according to the U.S. Department of Education.

The most basic type of adult education is adult literacy. Significant numbers of adults need help to improve reading, writing and comprehension skills, which can improve their chances of accomplishing work-related goals or personal goals. Another common form of adult edu-

cation focuses on work-related courses, with the aim of improving a worker's skills. Employees often need to upgrade their skills to keep up with workplaces that are adapting to changing technologies. Employers, employees and levels of government may all play a role in encouraging Adult Education of varied types.

So, Adult Education is a necessary part of the American system of education. It provides adults an opportunity to continue their learning—whether it is improving language skills or learning how to use a new form of technology—that will help them improve their lives. Adult education is also a way for people to explore and expand their interests.

Over the years, the Adult Education Center (AEC) in Hartford and the Center for Urban Research, Education and Training (CURET), Inc., a nonprofit community-based organization in Hartford have formed an exceptional partnership in addressing the educational aspirations of adults. AEC has the following offerings:

- All classes and support services are FREE to enrolled students.
- Students from around the world attend.
- Adults can earn a CT High School Diploma with GED, Spanish GED or the National External Diploma Program (NEDP)
- English Language Learners can enroll in four levels of ESL classes.
- An US Citizenship Test Prep class is offered
- Classes are offered both days and evenings, Monday thru Friday. A Summer Session is schedule for July 5-30, 2021!
- Vocational Trades exploration course are offered for students interested in Plumbing, Electrical, and Carpentry.
- The Adult Ed Center employs a full time social worker to assist students with accessing community resources, and a full time College Career Specialist who helps with job search, resume writing, college applications, financial aid and more
- All enrolled students are issued a laptop computer for remote learning options.
- Free events are held throughout the

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year including: job fairs, open houses, college recruiting days, community service visitors, and social gatherings. The hope is to restore the events calendar post-COVID.

- The Adult Ed Center is located in the Global Communications School building at 85 Edwards Street
- CURET is located at 1443 Albany Avenue, Hartford.

As a satellite site of AEC, students at CURET can access many of the above offerings. In addition, CURET offers a special feature for adults whose literacy skills are at a level identified as Adult Basic Education (ABE); this is generally the reality of many immigrants. Due to a host of reasons that precipitated some immigrants leaving school prematurely, they have made the decision to continue their education, and this requires special attention.

All aspects of life in the United States demand education to function optimally. While many of the immigrants are English speakers, they have unique literacy needs requiring an attention and understanding of cultural sensitivity nuances.

Many adults admit to themselves the need to upgrade their education and have made the decision to return to school. While carrying out their educational plans, the reality for some is that they are likely to find life responsibilities and schooling a balancing act requiring huge time commitment while tending to family, job and other responsibilities. These realities can truncate goals and aspirations, making it

difficult; some adult students perish their education improvement thought, and their stamina squashed, losing any hope to complete their high school diploma.

The AEC-CURET partnership addresses the many hurdles—personal and social fears, technology and comfort level—the adult students must confront and overcome in order to realize their dreams and aspirations. Returning to school as an adult is a big deal!

A student has a distinctive perspective: “I attend classes from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm because I work from 6:00 am to 5:00 pm as a school bus driver. I haven’t attended school since 1986. I can’t wait to get my GED. I want to show others that it’s never too late to further your education. My teachers have taught me so much, and my academics have improved.

The Adult Education program is a big plus for people like me who can’t attend morning classes and want a GED diploma. Thank you Ms. Dorett Jarrett-Irving, my teacher, and all the other teachers at CURET,” Jacqueline Ramirez said.

The AEC-CURET collaboration is an important connection, helping adult students with their burdens. In the end, with students’ motivation, persistency and determination, the AEC-CURET team supports and rejoices with them and their families at graduation ceremonies.

Many pursue continued education at a college, other continuing educational, vocational, and certification programs pursuing a career interest; some enter a branch

of the US military services; many access job opportunities and thereby are improving their socio-economic mobility and that of their families.

There are many reasons for

celebration with our adult students and their families—hard-earned accomplishments, improving their lives for the better. Indeed, the adult students are over comers and

contributors to their families and society!

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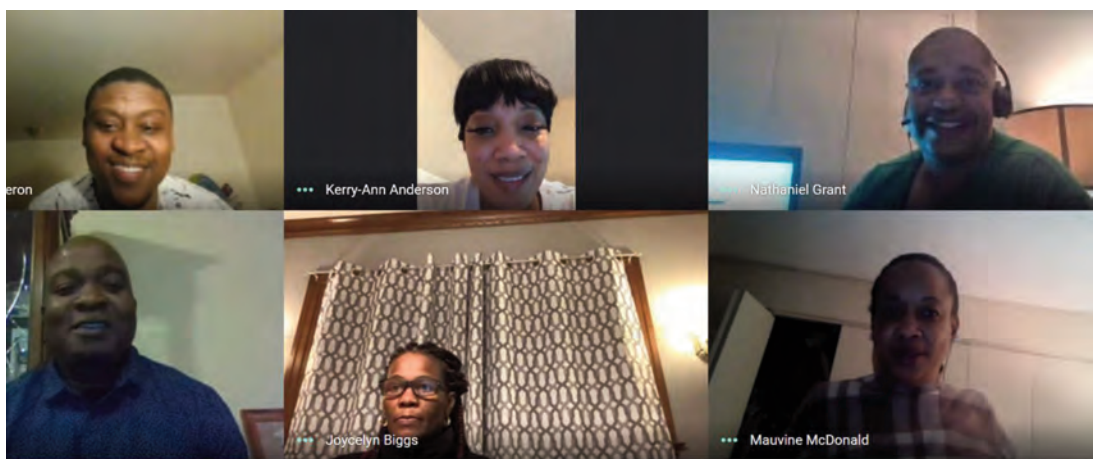
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*Ask about our satellite location at CURET, 1443 Albany Avenue!*

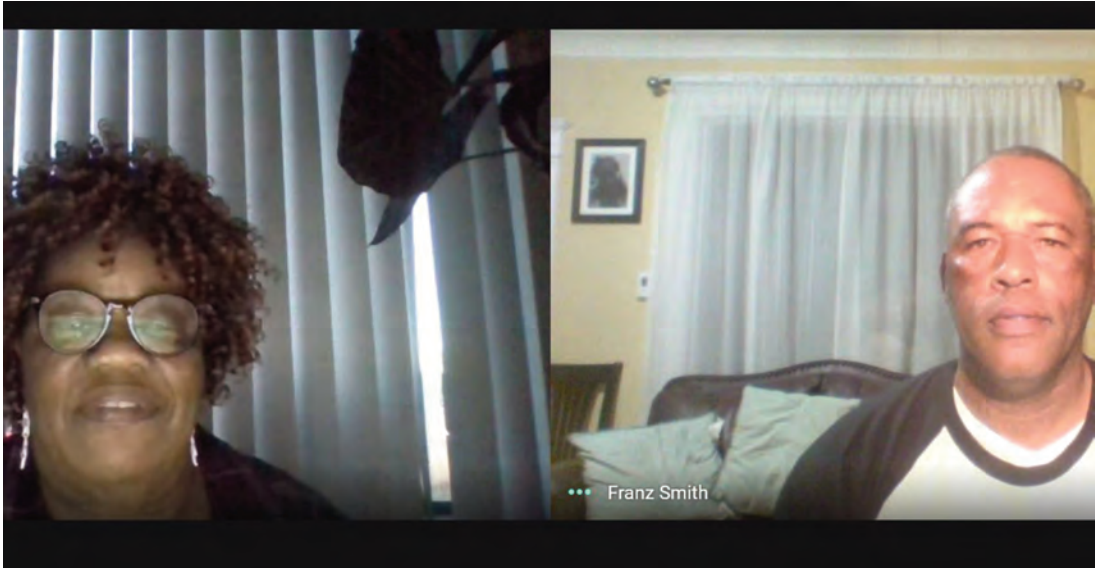



**Pictured at left:** *GED Students at AEC. Students Giani Joseph (foreground) and Vera Newman. Ms. Joseph arrived from St. Lucia with a high school diploma, but enrolled in the GED Prep Program to prepare for college. AEC’s Career Services office helped her secure a job in Animal Care at East Hartford’s POA, Inc., an animal rescue and veterinary services organization. She plans to pursue Animal Sciences at UConn in the fall. Ms. Newman will also receive her diploma in 2021, and plans to pursue a career in the music industry.*

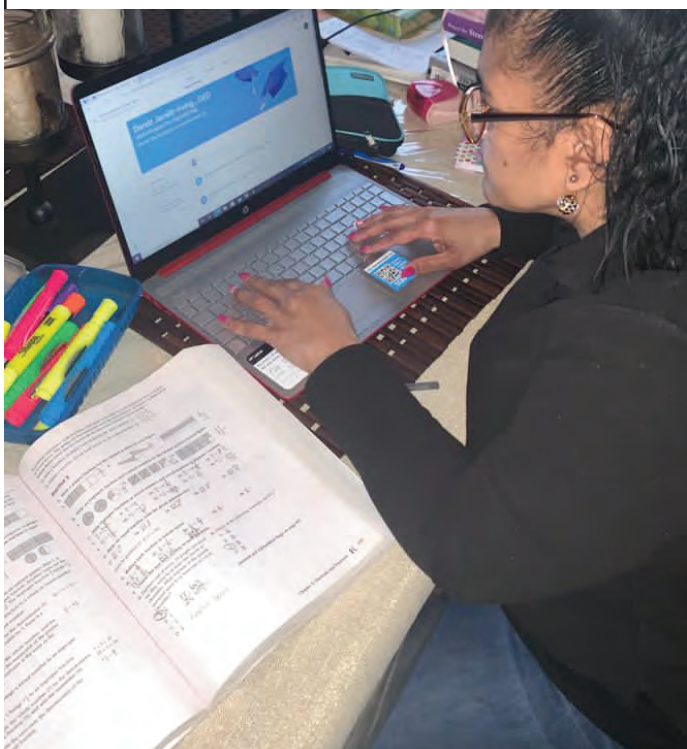
**Below:** *CURET Students with their teachers. Due to challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and adhering to social distance mandate, classes at CURET are conducted virtually.*



*Dr. Henry Haye (left) with a group of his students preparing for the GED exams.*



*Ms. Dorett Jarrett-Irving (left) with student Franz Smith. His goal is to earn his high school diploma.*



*Jacqueline Ramirez, student of Ms. Irving, working toward her high school diploma.*



Jim Z. Daniels

### The Year Ahead and More

The concerns that will be front and center this Year of Our Lord 2021, will occupy the nation's attention over to 2022 and into the national elections in 2024. Some are transformative and some will be devilish to solve. I will identify some of the most compelling for which solutions will be sought and how to prepare to avoid being tripped up by paralysis or over reaction.

On March 4, 2021, the head of the FBI, Christopher Wray, declared the presence and proclivi-

ties of domestic terror. Should I be thankful that the admission of the existence of such organizations and the danger they pose to communal order and a national security risk have arrived? It is 26 years after Timothy McVeigh, the Oklahoma City bomber, inflicted inestimable harm on that city.

Domestic terrorism will for the foreseeable future be a national millstone issue affecting the orderly functioning of the nation's affairs. The FBI has scores of years of experience infiltrating the Ku Klux Klan and the Justice Department's use of the judicial system to confiscate the assets of Klan members and put them out of business.

Those methods will be reinstated and will deliver credible success. If any of these organizations get designated a "terrorist organization," expect the IRS to cancel their registration as a non-profit, charitable organization.

The Black Lives Matter movement has reintroduced the issue of reparations for the free slave labor and human resources that contributed mightily to the economic powerhouse the nation is today.

This will resurrect old and embedded fears on the part of a large swath of the citizenry and trigger enraged hostility by some whites towards blacks.

This issue, if handled strategically, can become a vehicle for meaningful dialogues of this country's past performance regarding slavery. But reparation is not going to go away quietly. The disparities that are rife and affecting the communities of color need to be mitigated. The agency that should be leading the effort to grapple with the complexity of this issue, the church and specifically, the evangelical sector are AWOL (more to come on this in subsequent publications).

To understand the tragedy of what has become Christian Nationalism is to know that the origination of this movement is tied to the late Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority agglomeration and the sympathetic ear of President Reagan with its unitary focus abortion. Falwell was no friend of people of color and was an ardent supporter of apartheid in South Africa. Reagan did not deliver to their satisfaction

and neither did President George W. Bush two avowed Christians.

They settled for Trump because of his stand on abortion and his politically appealing charge to deliver a conservative majority on the Supreme Court. Trump's lifestyle while unappetizing was believed to be sufficient for another try and was rationalized by saying we are not electing a pastor. What kind of outcomes might we expect with Donald Trump now out of office? The conservatives (CPAC) that met recently erected a golden idol of Trump. Can worship be far away?

I will forecast by saying that the vast majority of the country will not give Trump a repeat performance. His recent performance was jarring to the nation's nerve centers and his transactional leadership style was devoid of cohesion and contributed to a diminished US international standing. America was not less than great because Trump said so.

It became less than great while he scuttled its accepted greatness by the nations of the world. It's the old adage, "To go quickly go alone. To go long go with company

(team)."

Then there is the issue of economic fairness. The fifteen-dollar minimum wage is such a profound standard for fairness it is difficult to see why it is not accepted with acclamation. But the election of two Democratic US Senate candidates from the state of Georgia where this issue functioned prominently highlights the real possibility that this issue may become law, as the nation more fully understands its basic fairness.

Immigration is the most emotional of all the issues that this Congress will have to grapple with. The caging of and or disappearance of over 500 children brought across the nation's boundaries and separated from their parents, raise concerns about the inhumanity of processes that were being administered.

There will be immigrants seeking admission because of the threats of severe punishment, humiliation, and harm by organized groups such as the street gangs and terrorist organizations in their home countries. The government will decide. The agenda is loaded for 2021.

## New Rent, Utility Relief Program For Minority-Owned Businesses, Avoid Stimulus Check Scams



State Senator Doug McCrory  
(D-Hartford)

Before I give an update on a new program to help Connecticut residents with rent and utility payments, I want to share a discussion on "Facebook Live" I recently held to assist minority-owned businesses.

Businesses owned by black Americans and Latinos/as have been particularly hit hard by the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is imperative we assist minority-owned businesses, helping them connect them with available resources such as the Paycheck Protection

Program (PPP). To watch the discussion on the PPP, I held with several panelists including representatives from the U.S. Small Business Administration and The Black Business Alliance, please visit my Facebook page at [@SenMcCrory](https://www.facebook.com/SenMcCrory) on Facebook.

**Reminder:** as of mid-March, the current deadline to apply for the Paycheck Protection Program is March 31, 2021. The U.S. Small Business Administration is available to assist entrepreneurs and small businesses. Call 860-240-4700 during hours of operation of 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. from Monday through Friday to reach the Connecticut District Office. To contact The Black Business Alliance, visit [bbua.org/](https://www.bbua.org/).

**UniteCT: Rent and Utility Relief Program.** UniteCT is a new program through the Department of Housing (DOH) provide rent and utility payment assistance to Connecticut households financially impacted by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The program is available to help households up to 80 percent of the HUD Area Median Income (AMI). Also, households in the state are eligible for the additional cir-

cumstances: qualified for unemployment or have experienced a reduction in household income, incurred significant costs, experienced a financial hardship due to COVID-19, or demonstrates a risk of experiencing homelessness or housing instability.

Eligible households can apply through an online portal that is accessible on a mobile device or computer. The application includes sections for the tenant(s) and landlord(s) to complete. In addition, it allows the applicant and landlord to follow the progress of the application and submission status.

**Summary of Available Assistance:** Accepted households can receive up to \$10,000 in rental assistance, with UniteCT offering to pay 85 percent of overdue rent in the six months prior to the application and landlords writing off 15 percent of those six months of arrears. UniteCT will additionally pay three months of upcoming rent; after then, a renter would need to recertify for another three months. Applicants will be asked to pay between 0 and 30 percent of impending rent payments depending on their income compared to AMI. Lastly, there is \$1,500 cap for utility assistance per

payer, with funds to be committed by September 2021 and disbursed by December 2021.

To learn more about the program, please visit the DOH website. If you have questions applying, call 1-844-UniteCT (1-844-864-8328) or email [DOH-UniteCT@ct.gov](mailto:DOH-UniteCT@ct.gov). Additionally, DOH has partnered with several Hartford-area organizations to help provide support in applying. Community Renewal Team – Phone: 860-560-5501 Urban League of Greater Hartford – Phone: 203-527-0147 Mutual Housing Association of Greater Hartford – Phone: 860-206-5270

**Beware and Avoid Stimulus Check Scams:** As families receive their stimulus checks provided by the American Rescue Plan, the Better Business Bureau is warning people to be aware of potential scams. A reminder: you do not need to pay fees to get this stimulus check or

provide personal information. Also, here are a few tips on how you can recognize scams and avoid identity theft.

- Be calm if someone claiming to be a government official contacts you. It's important not to act immediately. These scammers are hoping you'll act before you fact check
- Don't give your personal information to any sources you don't trust
- Check the URL if you're suspicious of a link. Be sure it ends in .gov if it claims to be a message from the government
- Don't respond to unknown calls, emails or texts. If you receive a call from the government, look up the office's official phone number and use that to return the call
- Confirm the agency you're being contacted by actually exists. Scammers can make up names of agencies that sound real, but aren't. You can verify the agency by doing a web search to find more information about it. Stay safe and take care.

## Community Information

### COVID-19 Vax Opportunities For Hartford Residents

By Violetta Haldane

Eligible Hartford residents must pre-register in order to receive vaccinations. Call 860-890-3161, Monday-Friday, 9:00 am – 5:00 pm, or visit the Collin Bennett Building, 1229 Albany Avenue, Tuesdays 1:00 – 4:00 pm, Advocacy to Legacy Office, 2nd Floor to pre-register.

Also, another vaccination site is: Parker Memorial Community Center and the time will be based on your pre-registered appointment.

Eligibility dates to receive vaccination are: March 22 – Ages 45 and above; April 12 – Ages 35 and above; and May 3 for ages 16 and above.

**Please Note:** Connecticut maintains a Vaccine Administration Management System (VAMS) where those who have been vaccinated are registered into the system.

A website address is provided for all to obtain a certification of their vaccination. For additional information, please visit: <https://portal.ct.gov/Vaccine-Portal>.

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