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Olivia Holden, 2025 YWCA Milestones Business Honoree

<i>In This Issue...</i>					
Perryman and DiPofi Page 2	Ben Jealous and Funding Cuts Page 4	HerHub Luncheon Page 7	Travel Section: Shana and The Cookout Page 9	The Civil Rights Tour Page 11	Classifieds Page 15
Tolliver Page 3	Cover Story: Olivia Holden Page 5	AALP at Indiana Ave Baptist Page 8	The Negro Green Book Page 10	Book Review Page 13	The CBTU BHM Dinner Page 16

A Commitment to Inclusion

By Rev. Donald L. Perryman, Ph.D.

The Truth Contributor

Inclusion is not a matter of political correctness. It is the key to growth

- Jesse Jackson



A grandson of Italian immigrants, Vince DiPofi's career and strong connection to people attempting to find a better life is as tightly linked to Bancroft Street as the University of Toledo and St. Francis de Sales High School—both of which he and I proudly call alma mater.

Like the stretch of Bancroft that connects these two institutions, Vince's path has been defined by a steady drive toward excellence. From his early days as a college intern to becoming the chief executive officer (CEO) at SSOE, Vince has built a legacy of leadership, innovation, and community impact over his 40 years of professional experience.

SSOE is one of the fastest-growing firms in the nation. Under DiPofi's leadership, The Toledo-based international engineering firm has become a "leading edge thought leader in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and design automation" while thriving in industries ranging from Advanced Technology to Healthcare.

Yet, DiPofi's strong efforts in developing a culture of inclusion demonstrate that inclusive policies like DEI not only foster growth and profitability but also contribute to creating positive change in the world.

In this week's conversation, I explore how Vince DiPofi's journey—rooted on Bancroft Street - and his commitment to DEI - led to groundbreaking success at SSOE.

Perryman: Let's start at the beginning. How did you arrive as CEO at SSOE?

DiPofi: I was born and raised in Toledo from basic, middle-class roots. My grandparents were Italian immigrants. My father was a City of Toledo policeman, and my mother worked as a retail clerk at the old LaSalle's and Macy's stores. I had two brothers and two sisters, so I always had a full house. We're Catholic, so I'm a St. Francis de Sales graduate.

Perryman:How about after high school?

DiPofi: From a young age, it was drilled into you that education was important to be successful. We had five kids and five college degrees; everybody paid for their own and worked their way through college. SSOE is the second company. I started as an engineer and worked my way up over the years to CEO. That's the 5,000-foot view.

Perryman:SSOE is known for several Employee Resource Groups (ERG). Please talk a bit about those.

DiPofi: We started employee resource groups about two or three years ago, focusing on our company trying to be more inclusive. When I inter-

viewed people and talked about our company and culture when I became CEO, I was disappointed to learn how people felt that the culture was not inclusive. People didn't feel like they could be themselves to work.

One of the people I talked to, Anthony Jefferson, said, "Vince, you don't even know this, but every Black employee that the company hires, I reach out to them and try to make them feel wanted and tell them how the company works and everything. They're not ever comfortable in this company." So, it was a real eye-opener for me.

Perryman: How did you then respond?

DiPofi: That was one of the motivations behind me hiring Candice Harrison. Candice has been a mentor to me and taught me to think differently about how people are included and what makes them feel included.

These employee resource groups have been wonderful in allowing people to be themselves and connect with others with similar backgrounds authentically. Since then, our employee engagement scores have increased to the top 10 percent in the country, literally because people feel this is a sign that the company is inclusive.

Moreover, we have found that 25 percent of those hired at SSOE join one of the employee resource groups. It's really been interesting to see the evolution in our organizational culture. In just two years, we have experienced very quick success.

Perryman:Well, let me compliment you on that effort. A lot of attention is often given to the almost insurmountable problem that minorities encounter in just trying to compete for jobs without having the same opportunities as other, more privileged people. However, once crossing the bridge into corporate or other institutional organizations, minorities might not automatically fit neatly into systems and structures erected for dominant occupants.

So, Blacks and others, once they arrive at a company like SSOE, are often in a completely foreign land without help or guidance. If they are going to be successful, and from personal experience early in my career, they will need assistance and mentoring.

Also, SSOE has been mentioned as a really great place to work, generating a 4.3/5 on Glass Door, and you've also won some awards. Talk about that.

DiPofi: First of all, before I do, I want to acknowledge your comment about people getting in the door but then finding out it's a foreign land. That was a blind spot for me that I didn't understand until we established the employee resource groups. I want to acknowledge that it was a big change for me to understand that you're kind of in a foreign land; I see that much better now.

The Entrepreneur of the Year award was based on my work to transform

... continued on page 12



Vince DiPofi

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Community Calendar

March 1-2

St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church will host their Annual Men's Day Weekend. There will be a Drive-by, Eat in Breakfast that will begin on Saturday at 9:00 a.m. till 12:00 noon all you can eat. The donation is \$15.00 dollars. We will have our Spirit Filled Service on Sunday beginning at 10:45. We invite you to come and share in our Men's Day weekend worship experience. Any question please call 419-246-2886.

So, Are You Assuming That ...

By Lafe Tolliver, Esq

Guest Column

Now that the nation has been placed on notice that Trump is equating the laudable goals of D.E.I. (diversity, equity and inclusion) with all things deemed intellectually challenging, a lack of comprehension and of no merit, what does D.E.I. say about those whose only claim to fame, privilege and fortune is being white?

From the aspersions cast against D.E.I., the Trumpers are conducting a mass media campaign to equate D.E.I. and their bigoted offense to the concept of Affirmative Action.

Why is it whenever people of color or women seek to pry open a closed American system of privileges and equal opportunity, they are immediately met with aggression and hostility and a campaign of disinformation?

What is so troubling the White American psyche that whenever someone other than a white person, who through hard work, grit and perseverance takes command or exhibits competent skills or mastery of a subject, that they are called into account for their accomplishments?

Pinpoint, if you will, the inner angst and fears that White America wrestles with when someone, not of their own ethnic tribe, is placed in a position of power or wealth that they feel it is an existential threat to their station in life?

When you start placing those "pins," remember that America is still recovering from being a Jim Crow country and still has half of its brain in the past history wherein Black people and other people of color were intentionally and legally subjected to heinous treatment and social pummeling for no more than that their melanin was not considered Caucasian.

Remember (for some) that childhood ditty: "If you are white, you are right, If you are Brown, stick around, if you are Black.... get back!"

Some ditties have a life of their own and the meaning behind that obnoxious mantra is to let you know in no uncertain terms, that the American welcome mat and equity was not intended or designed for everyone.

Now, if you must apply the now corrupted terms of D.E.I. to the American workforce, you will notice that corporate America is full of wummies and people who could not locate their nose in a dark closet.

But that is America. It can turn its eyes the other way when one of "theirs" makes profound errors in judgment, mis apply the law and guts good intentioned social policies that hurt people of color.

Such "reversed" D.E.I. people populate the Congress, legislatures, police departments, the teaching corps, the military and of course, the biggest glaring example of moronic behavior being richly awarded and elevated, is the person who currently occupies the White House!

Image the howl and the collective beating of breasts if Obama allowed an uncredentialed Black person, not vetted and posing as his alter ego, to take a chainsaw to the agencies of the US government and fire thousands of people without notice or giving them due process (notice, hearing and protection of their rights).

If that were to happen, Senator Mitch McConnell, Joe Jordan, Senator Hawley, and a host of other GOP congresspeople would be on the Capitol steps with pitchforks in hand, demanding Obama be impeached!

They would call him every name but a child of God! Remember when Trump wanted to see Obama's birth certificate and then, later, he wanted to see his law school transcripts because he did not believe he could be on Harvard Law Review!

Of course, being the stable genius as he loves to brag about, Trump did not release any of his undergraduate or graduate records and we know why, for it would have shown him to be a legacy admittee at Wharton and it would have shredded his crafted image that he was a very bright student.

But...no matter. As long as Trump was and is still able to con half of the American voting public that he was/is a victim, he would be their "retribution," and all was forgiven and forgotten about his egregious and hateful background.

Imagine a Black man having 34 felony convictions and being adjudged a sexual abuser (among many other charges) running for the White House. The roar and outcry would have been deafening from White America about his mere presence desecrating hallowed ground.

But with America's double standard of justice and fairness, the foibles of Trump and his coterie of brainwashed sycophants are adept at playing the race card and as such seek to diminish and traduce all things of color.

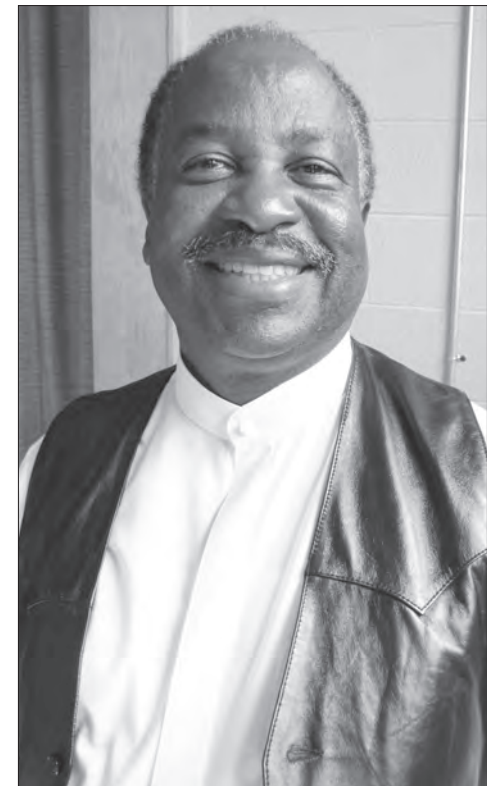
This is the genesis of Trump and President Musk colluding to try to re-make America in the image of the past 1930's and 1940's where whites

reigned supreme and the Black person was relegated to Stepin' Fetchit roles replete with the obligatory rolling eyeballs.

D.E.I. is a cruel attempt to sully anything that remotely indicates the competence of Black people and women and other people of color. It is a complete and knowing attempt to butcher D.E.I. into an unrecognizable doctrine so that the media and public would shun it as favoring "those others."

We live in interesting times. DEI simply expands the pool of qualified candidates to, "shoot their best shot" at available job slots or be notified that such opportunities even exist.

Contact Lafe Tolliver at tolliver@juno.com



Career Tech Education Outstanding Senior Awards

On Friday, February 28 from 10:45 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., Start High School will host its Career Tech Education Outstanding Senior Awards Luncheon. Students excelling in their career tech programs will be recognized for their hard work and dedication in the classroom.

The event will be held in the school library with the following career tech programs:

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Trump's Funding Freezes and Clawbacks: Illegal, Stupid, Dangerous

By Ben Jealous

"Panic, confusion, and anger."

That's how BlueGreen Alliance president Jason Walsh described to CNN the state that Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) grant awardees were left in after having their funding frozen (then unfrozen, then frozen again) by the Trump administration.

"Contracts are going to get broken if this doesn't stop, and workers are going to get laid off," said Walsh. "I didn't anticipate how fully brazen they'd be in ignoring the courts."

It is brazen – for its lawlessness and cruelty, as well as its stupidity.

There's a lot of lawbreaking going on, from usurping Congress's constitutional "power of the purse" to defying court orders. But administration efforts to freeze funding appropriated by Congress and claw back money already obligated under contracts threatens our national credibility. And now, with EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin's attempts to pull back \$20 billion in money that has already been awarded under the Inflation Reduction Act's Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF), we are seeing how the administration's tactics could potentially cost taxpayers more in lawsuit damages than the money they are trying to freeze and claw back!

And, of course, in that scenario, Americans would lose out on the purpose of the appropriated funds: to lower energy costs, revitalize local economies, and address the climate crisis. The targeted \$20 billion in GGRF money is specifically meant to mobilize financing and private capital into clean energy projects to create jobs. And this comes on the heels of Zeldin's EPA already having illegally frozen funds under contract through the EPA's Solar for All program.



Federal judges are saying the money needs to keep flowing. One in Rhode Island last week reaffirmed his temporary restraining order to block Trump's funding freeze and noted the administration was in violation of the order.

As a former congressman and litigator, Administrator Zeldin should have at least a basic understanding of the law. And anyone with common sense should realize attempting to claw back already-disbursed funds to help us avoid the very worst of the climate crisis is as illogical as it is illegal. These investments are lowering costs for families, providing more reliable and resilient energy options in communities across the country, and helping create good jobs.

If you were to do a quick scan of this administration's actions and statements over its first four weeks in office, you would see a clear list of national priorities it is willing to sacrifice for tax cuts for billionaires: public health, national parks, cancer research, food for starving people (both at home and abroad), the security of our nuclear arsenal, and good jobs for working families – just to name a few.

What would also stand out are the lengths to which this administration is willing to go – and the straws at which they are willing to grasp – in their efforts to skirt the law and inflict harm on American communities.

One of the administration's favorite talking points a few weeks ago was that the so-called Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) had, according to President Trump, "identified and stopped \$50 million being sent to Gaza to buy condoms for Hamas." The claim was meant to justify DOGE's government-wide slash-and-burn campaign that had just gotten started with USAID, as well as diversity, equity, and inclusion offices and Environmental Justice programs.

DOGE head and Trump's co-president Elon Musk fed the claim into the Far Right's manufactured outrage machine on his X platform, where it snowballed (reminiscent of the racist lie during the presidential campaign that members of the Haitian immigrant community in Springfield, Ohio were eating local pets). Trump himself repeated the claim multiple times and even inflated – baselessly – the cost of the supposed condom shipments to \$100 million.

Of course, there was not a shred of truth to those claims. A former Biden administration official who worked on Gaza aid called the claim "imaginary" and said, "It's a lie, they are making s*** up." It turns out the Gaza mentioned in the records found by DOGE was probably in reference to HIV and Tuberculosis aid to Gaza Province in Mozambique, and there were no massive condom deliveries to there nor anywhere in the Middle East.

Now, in trying to defend his reckless and ideological war on clean energy funding, EPA Administrator Zeldin and others in the Trump administration are playing the same game. Zeldin and the administration have suggested the contracts with EPA grantees and the process by which funds are administered by Citibank through the GGRF were rushed, not properly vetted, and done in some novel and inappropriate way.

But Zealan Hoover, who directed IRA program implementation at the EPA under President Biden, attests the process and institutions involved were thoroughly vetted and pointed out the government has been using similar arrangements with private banks since the 1800s. And Zeldin's 'evidence?' A supposed sting video by the group Project Veritas, infamous for dishonest smear attacks using highly edited recordings of its targets. Zeldin cited a recording by the group in a bizarre rant he posted to X last week.

Donald Trump and Lee Zeldin should quit skirting the law and defending their actions with outrageous lies. And we should all recognize their actions as the latest evidence they are willing to sink to any low to do the bidding of their fossil fuels cronies.

Ben Jealous is the Executive Director of the Sierra Club, former president/CEO of the NAACP and a Professor of Practice at the University of Pennsylvania.

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Olivia Holden: Empowering Entrepreneurs, Building a Legacy

By Asia Nail

The Truth Reporter

There are people who don't just lead—they uplift, empower, and transform the world around them. **Olivia Holden**, executive director of **Assets Toledo**, is one of those rare visionaries. With wisdom, resilience, and an unwavering commitment to nurturing businesses, she has helped shape the future of entrepreneurship in northwest Ohio. With over 4,900 graduates of the Assets Toledo program, her impact extends far beyond numbers—it is written in the success stories of those who dared to dream and found the tools to make those dreams a reality.

As the **2025 YWCA Milestones Business Honoree**, Holden's recognition is not just an award; it is a tribute to a lifetime of service. She has given hope to countless aspiring business owners, proving that economic empowerment is a cornerstone of community transformation.

A Champion for Aspiring Entrepreneurs

When Olivia Holden speaks, her words carry the weight of experience and the warmth of someone who truly cares.

"We don't just teach business," Holden says. "We teach people how to see themselves as capable, worthy, and powerful. Confidence is the currency that turns an idea into an enterprise."

Assets Toledo is more than an organization—it is a launching pad for those who want to build something of their own. Through a 13-week intensive program, participants learn the fundamentals of business planning, budgeting, and marketing. But what makes this program truly extraordinary is its focus on people.

"I tell every class, 'You already have everything you need within you. We just help you put the pieces together.'" Holden explains. "Entrepreneurship is not just about making money; it's about making a difference."

Breaking Barriers, Creating Opportunity

Holden has spent her career ensuring that financial limitations do not become roadblocks to success. Assets Toledo provides a sliding-scale tuition model, making business education accessible to those with limited resources. Beyond education, they offer mentorship and micro-loans, equipping graduates with the tools to take the next step.

"We're in the business of building bridges," Holden says. "Talent is everywhere, but opportunity isn't. My job is to make sure more people get across to the other side."

These opportunities have launched businesses in industries ranging from food services and retail to tech and wellness. Every graduate carries a story of resilience—single parents seeking financial independence, immigrants finding their place in a new country, and individuals re-entering the workforce after life-altering setbacks.

"We don't just give them knowledge," Holden adds. "We give them a family. And once you're part of the Assets family, you're never alone."

Mentorship: The Heart of Success

One of the defining pillars of Assets Toledo is its mentorship program. Every graduate is paired with an experienced professional who provides



Assets Toledo Executive Director Olivia Holden

guidance and support as they navigate their entrepreneurial journey.

"Starting a business is like planting a tree," Holden says. "You need strong roots, you need care, and you need someone to help you when the storms come."

Mentors provide not just business expertise but encouragement, accountability, and a steady hand in times of uncertainty. Many former students return to serve as mentors, creating a cycle of support that extends across generations of business owners.

"I always say, 'The best thing you can do for your success is to pour into someone else's,'" Holden reflects. "When we lift each other up, we all rise."

The Power of Community and Connection

The impact of Assets Toledo extends beyond individual businesses—it strengthens the entire community. By fostering entrepreneurship, the program fuels local economic growth, creates jobs, and revitalizes neighborhoods.

"Small businesses aren't just storefronts," Holden says. "They are the heartbeat of a city. They bring culture, identity, and pride to a community."

Each month, Assets alumni gather to share updates, celebrate wins, and seek advice on challenges. The relationships built within these cohorts extend far beyond the classroom.

"We are more than a business network," Holden explains. "We are a movement. And when people move together, they make waves."

A Legacy of Empowerment

Holden's impact on Toledo is undeniable. She has spent her life breaking

...continued on page 6



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Olivia Holden...continued from page 5

down barriers for women, people of color, and those historically left out of the economic conversation. Her work at Assets Toledo has laid the foundation for thousands of businesses—each one a testament to what is possible when people are given the tools and encouragement to succeed.

“My grandmother used to tell me, ‘When you get a blessing, build a bigger table, not a higher fence,’” Holden shares. “That’s what I’ve tried to do my entire career—make more room, create more chances, and remind people they belong in the room.”

Her influence reaches beyond Toledo, inspiring business leaders and organizations across the nation to adopt similar models of inclusive entrepreneurship.

Success in Numbers and Industries

The impact of Assets Toledo is reflected in its remarkable 89% business owner success rate. This statistic is more than a number—it represents a network of entrepreneurs who have turned their passions into profitable, sustainable businesses. From daycares and restaurants to fine jewelry brands, hair care lines, educational programs, nonprofit organizations, construction firms, and marketing agencies, Assets graduates are making their mark in industries that shape our community.

“We’ve watched people turn their kitchen recipes into bustling restaurants, their love for children into thriving daycare centers, and their creativity into flourishing jewelry and beauty brands,” Holden says. “Every business we help start is another step toward economic empowerment in Toledo.”

A Well-Deserved Honor

As she accepts the YWCA Milestones Business Honoree award, Holden remains focused on the future. She sees every graduate of Assets Toledo as proof that change is possible, that economic empowerment can be a reality for all, and that communities thrive when entrepreneurship is cultivated.

“This award isn’t just about me,” Holden says. “It’s about every single person who took a chance on their dreams, who bet on themselves, who refused to give up. I’m just honored to be part of their journey.”

For all the late nights, the struggles, the self-doubt, and the triumphs—Olivia Holden has been there, guiding, cheering, and making sure no dream was left behind. Her work is a gift to Toledo, to every entrepreneur who dared to take a step forward, and to the generations of business owners who will one day follow in her footsteps.



The Author and Olivia Holden at graduation

The YWCA of Northwest Ohio stands as a beacon of advocacy, equity, and opportunity for women in our region. Through programs that support economic advancement, social justice, and leadership, the YWCA continues to uplift those striving for a better future. Olivia Holden’s recognition as the 2025 Milestones Business Honoree is a reflection of her tireless dedication.

“I cried when I was told I was nominated, it made my heart sing to be honored doing something I love. I give all the Glory to God,” she says with deep gratitude.

Her work aligns seamlessly with the YWCA’s vision of a world where all women—regardless of background—can thrive, lead, and leave a legacy of excellence.

To Olivia Holden and the entire Assets Toledo team—thank you. Thank you for believing in people before they believed in themselves. Thank you for turning ideas into realities. And thank you for proving that when we empower one, we empower all.

Congratulations to Olivia Holden on this well-deserved honor! Learn more about the YWCA Milestones Awards [here](#).

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Her Hub Luncheon Features Speaker Ebony Carter on How to Scale Up a Business

By Fletcher Word

The Truth Editor

Ebony Carter, vice president of Minority Business Services and director, Minority Business Assistance Center for the Toledo Regional Chamber of Commerce, was the guest speaker at the HerHub Women of Toledo Initiative's networking luncheon on Thursday, February 20 at Toledo Botanical Gardens.

Thursday's luncheon, a tribute to Black History Month, also featured a meal provided by a Black owned caterer, Tom Otieno, owner of Jikoni Toledo, and dessert by Alisha Stallworth of Pound Cake Expressions. Stallworth is also a member of HerHub.

Carter's address to the attendees, most of whom were women business owners, was a primer on how to "scale-up" their enterprises.

"We are told that money is the root of all evil," she began. "I don't believe that. I don't believe that. Money is a tool and if you don't understand that, then you fear it."

Carter's talk was titled "The Art of the Scale Up," and she drove home the point that entrepreneurs and business owners were the creative forces within their operations while others, such as advisors, were there to assist not to make the critical decisions. "You are the creator," she emphasized.

She urged those business owners who felt they are ready to scale up to recognize their vision and to "make sure your vision is clear" and to adopt an effective plan to execute that vision. "Vision without execution is hallucination," she noted several times during her speech.

Carter introduced to her audience a "financial freedom cycle" which consisted of 10 steps on the path to scaling up a business: "know where you stand, set your goals, track where your money goes, spend less on useless junk, pay



Ebony Carter

off debt asap, save surplus money, create more sources of income, avoid lifestyle inflation, invest in the future and repeat the process."

The Minority Business Assistance Center offers an eight-week course for entrepreneurs who desire to scale up, she informed the attendees. That course is currently taking place in the Junction neighborhood.

HerHub Toledo is a membership-based initiative of the Women of Toledo organization. WOT was formed in 2014 in order to assist women entrepreneurs to the resources they need and to foster the collaboration necessary to grow their businesses.

...continued on page 14

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African American Legacy Project Economic Discussion

By Tricia Hall

The Truth Reporter

The African American Legacy Project organized a day-long opportunity to highlight the history and economic impact of Dorr Street. One activity focused on moving the business sector forward through a facilitated discussion that included a panel.

Local entrepreneur Charlie Mack facilitated the discussion that included local entrepreneur Thomas Nash and a round robin conversation.

"My father came to Toledo in 1969," said Mack. "He started a few businesses and taught me by passing those businesses to us. It's about creating businesses in our community. Small businesses are the backbone of the economy. I wanted to create a career for myself and that prospective has shifted. I have children who are my wealth and opportunity. I do real estate and radio, I bring my children into the radio station. We have to pass something along, it doesn't have to be a business, it can be knowledge."

Thomas Nash answered questions about generational wealth and turning conversation into action.



Rich Hogan, Charlie Mack and Thomas Nash



Rich Hogan and Robert Smith

... continued on page 14



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◀ Mural of Martin Luther King, Jr. by Peruvian artist Mario Acevedo Torero and BGSU Students on Broadway St. in the Middlegrounds District of downtown Toledo.

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The Cookout at South Beach Wine & Food Festival: A Celebration of Black Culture, Flavor and Community

By Shana Lee
The Truth Travel Contributor

The South Beach Wine & Food Festival is packed with so many fun events, but there's one that stands out for its flavor, energy, and deeper cultural significance—The Cookout.

Hosted by James Beard Award-winning chef, author and TV personality Chef JJ Johnson, alongside media personality and entrepreneur Angela Yee, this event is more than just a feast. It's a powerful celebration of African American cuisine, reclaiming its brilliance and honoring the rich culinary traditions that have shaped it.

Chef JJ is dedicated to celebrating and elevating Black culture through food, using it as a powerful tool to break barriers, foster connections and reshape historical narratives. His restaurant, FIELDTRIP, embodies this mission, and The Cookout brings it to life on a grand scale. More than just a dining experience, it's a tribute to the pioneers of Black culinary traditions—a space where guests can immerse themselves in the depth, diversity, and richness of Black culture, one unforgettable bite at a time.

At The Cookout, each dish tells a story—one of resilience, heritage and innovation. From Sweet Potato Mac and Cheese to Guava Bread Pudding,

every bite carried the weight of history and the joy of tradition. This wasn't just soul food; it was a soulful experience.

Seafood lovers were in heaven with Lemon Pepper Prawns, Codfish Croquettes and delicious Ceviche that was sure to be remembered. Each chef at the event brought his or her unique perspective, reconstructing historical food traditions while paying homage to culturally significant

... continued on page 10



Host Chef JJ Johnson and the author



Eden Roc Miami Beach



The Truth Travelogue • The Truth Travelogue • The Truth Travelogue • The Truth Travelogue • The Truth Travelogue • The Truth Travelogue

The Negro Motorist Green Book

By Ricky Tyus
The Truth Travel Consultant

The GREEN BOOK with its list of hotels, boarding houses, restaurants, beauty shops, barber shops and various other services can most certainly help solve your travel problems. It was the idea of Victor H. Green, the publisher, who, in introducing the Green Book, said it was an attempt to save the travelers of his race “as many difficulties and embarrassments as possible.”

The Negro Motorist Green Book (at times styled The Negro Motorist Green-Book or titled The Negro Travelers’ Green Book) was an annual guidebook for African-American roadtrippers, commonly referred to simply as the Green Book.

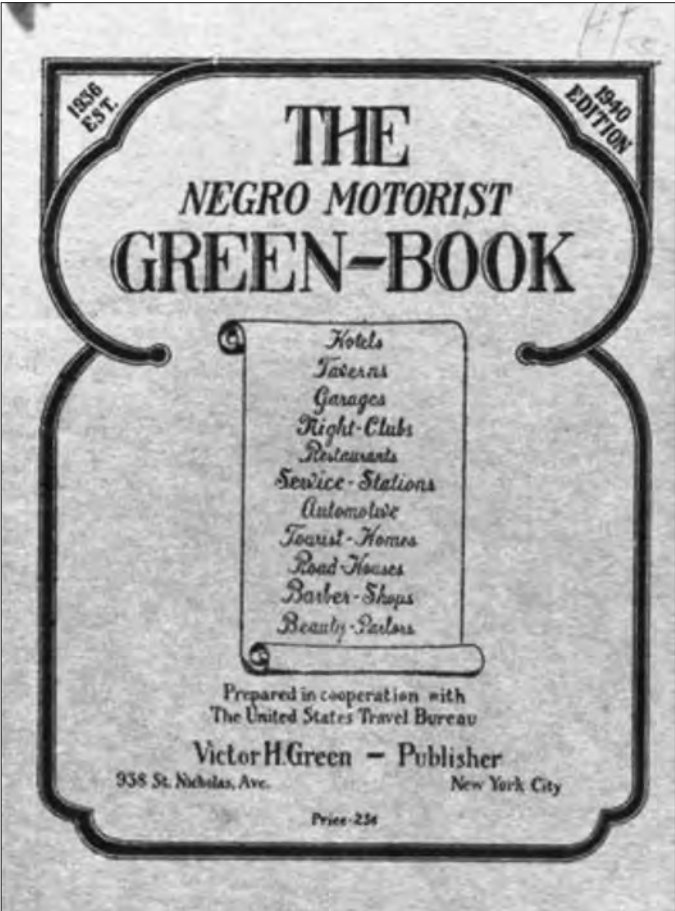
It was originated and published by New York City mailman Victor Hugo Green in the United States from 1936 to 1966, during the era of Jim Crow laws , when open and often legally prescribed discrimination against non-whites was widespread. But because the emerging African-American middle class became car owners Green expanded the coverage in his book from the New York area to much of North America, he also founded a travel agency.

Many blacks took to driving, in part to avoid segregation on public transportation. As the writer George Schuyler put it in 1930, “all Negroes who can do so purchase an automobile as soon as possible in order to be free of discomfort, discrimination, segregation and insult.”[1] Black Americans employed as athletes, entertainers and salesmen also traveled frequently for work purposes.

African American travelers faced a variety of dangers and inconveniences, such as white-owned businesses refusing to serve them or repair their vehicles, being refused accommodation or food by white-owned hotels, and threats of physical violence and forcible expulsion from whites-only “sundown towns.” Green founded and published The Negro Motorist Green Book to tackle such problems, compiling resources “to give the

Negro traveler information that will keep him from running into difficulties, embarrassments and to make his trip more enjoyable.”

From a New York-focused first edition published in 1936, Green expanded the work to cover much of North America, including most of the United States and parts of Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean and Bermuda. The Green Book became “the bible of black travel during Jim Crow,” enabling black travelers to find lodgings, businesses, and gas stations that would serve them along the road. It was little known outside the African American community. Shortly after passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlawed the types of racial discrimination that had made the Green Book necessary, publication ceased and it fell into obscurity.



The Cookout... continued from page 9

ingredients and cooking techniques.

But The Cookout is more than just a culinary showcase—it’s a celebration of community, culture, and joy. Held at the stunning Eden Roc Miami Beach, the event felt like the ultimate backyard party, with a DJ lineup that kept the energy high. DJ Mike Deuce and DJ Too Much spun the perfect mix of hip-hop, R&B, and Afrobeats, creating a rhythm that had everyone vibing between bites.

Guests danced, toasted to good times, and connected over a shared love

for food and culture. And what made it even more special? Seeing Black culinary talent shine on such a major stage, proving that Black food isn’t just comfort food—it’s art, history, and innovation on a plate.

If you ever get the chance to attend The Cookout, do not miss it!



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The Civil Rights Trail

By Ricky Tyus, Owner of Tyus Tours & Travel

The Truth Travel Consultant

Today, as Black history is being removed from many school systems in America, it is crucial to recognize that true history can still be found along the Civil Rights Trail.

The Civil Rights Trail preserves and commemorates the monumental efforts and sacrifices made in the fight for equality. It provides invaluable insight into the struggles, triumphs and pivotal moments in Black history that have shaped America.

By embarking on a journey along this trail, individuals have the opportunity to delve into a transformative period of American history, gaining insights into the struggles and triumphs of those who fought for equality and justice. The trail offers an immersive experience, allowing visitors to walk in the footsteps of the brave men and women who paved the way for civil rights advancements, ensuring that their stories and sacrifices are not forgotten.

The U.S. Civil Rights Trail is a collection of churches, courthouses, schools, museums and other landmarks primarily in the Southern states where activists challenged segregation in the 1950s and 1960s to advance social justice. Famous sites include the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama; Little Rock Central High School in Arkansas; the Greensboro, North Carolina, Woolworth's where sit-ins began; the National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee; and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthplace in Atlanta, Georgia, to name a few.

The people, locations and destinations included in the Civil Rights Trail provide a way for families, travelers and educators to experience history firsthand. For details about the sites and stories from civil rights pioneers, visit CivilRightsTrail.com

Some notable sites on the trail include:

16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama



The 16th Street Baptist was a large and prominent church located downtown, just blocks from Birmingham's commercial district and City Hall. Just before 11 o'clock on September 15, 1963, instead of rising to begin prayers the congregation was knocked to the ground.

The 16th Street Baptist Church was a key meeting place for civil rights leaders and activists, making it a target for white supremacist violence. The bombing on September 15, 1963, was a tragic event that resulted in the deaths of four young girls and marked a turning point in the Civil Rights Movement.

Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama

Is now a Historic Landmark and was the site of the brutal Bloody Sunday, March 7, 1965

On this day in 1965 some 600 people began a 54-mile march from Brown Chapel AME Church in Selma to the state capitol in Montgomery. As the marchers proceeded along U.S. Route 80, State and local law enforcement officers attacked them with billy clubs and tear gas, forcing them to retreat



into Selma. "The brutal attacks on peaceful marchers shocked the nation and drew widespread condemnation, highlighting the urgent need for change."

Finally, after a federal court order permitted the protest, the voting rights marchers left Selma on March 21 under the protection of federalized National Guard troops. Four days later, they reached Montgomery with the crowd growing to 25,000 by the time they reached the capitol steps. These events in Selma galvanized public opinion and mobilized Congress to pass the Voting Rights Act, which President Johnson signed into law on August 6, 1965.

Today, although the bridge still bears the name of a white supremacist, it stands as a powerful symbol of civil rights progress and a reminder of the sacrifices made for voting rights.

Little Rock Central High School in Arkansas



Rock Central High School in Arkansas: This school became a national symbol of the struggle for desegregation when nine African American students, known as the Little Rock Nine, faced violent opposition as they integrated the school in 1957. The courage and determination of these students played a crucial role in advancing civil rights and challenging segregation in public schools.

National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Ten-



Where were you when Martin Luther King was shot? This tragic event took place on April 4, 1968, at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee, ...continued on page 13

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Perryman...continued from page 2

our company culture, but also on how we've made digital transformation a big part of the company. The business has grown very well, and I don't find that to be coincidental with the fact that we've become more diverse and expanded the people that come into the company. I think those two have gone hand in hand over the last couple of years.

Perryman: Let's shift for a moment. How much of SSOE's \$350 million in annual revenue is related to government contracts?

DiPofi: Practically none, directly. Most of my work is not with the federal government. Let's say we do a lot of work with semiconductor companies, so they are recipients of money from the 2022 Creating Helpful Incentives to Produce Semiconductors for America Act (CHIPS) that the government legislated to address the global semiconductor shortage. We've done some hospital design work for the Veterans Administration, but most of our work is indirect.

Perryman: Critics argue that diversity is more about optics than outcomes. Can you discuss how your DEI efforts benefit your business and the community?

DiPofi: You'll find that the more diverse companies are typically more profitable and more successful. There's plenty of data to support this. We have found that SSOE's turnover rates are half the industry average. Again, it's a place where people want to come to work, and they don't want to leave. We, of course, do our best to be competitive with how we pay our people, but at the end of the day, it comes down to the fact that people like working at this place and feeling comfortable.

When the rest of the industry's turnover rates are 10 percent, ours is around five to six percent. That's saving me so much money from retraining people and recruiting costs, so there are tangible business benefits. Not only is our employee satisfaction increasing, but our customer satisfaction is increasing, too.

So, when I say we've become a much more diverse company, at the same time, our customer satisfaction has increased. You put all those things together, and it's benefitted us.

Perryman: How would you respond to those who may complain that

diversity initiatives conflict with merit-based advancement?

DiPofi: SSOE never set quotas for the program we established; it has always been merit-based. Our approach was to level the playing field and ensure everybody has the same opportunity, and these employee resource groups have been a big part of that. To your earlier point, if I'm in a foreign land, the chances of me being promoted and advancing are much less than those of someone who knows the land. So doing things like employee resource groups and helping people understand how to navigate a foreign land, as you say, is a big part of that.

Our hiring and promotion are merit-based, and we've seen advancement across the spectrum, with more people being hired and more people advanced. I don't want to report that we've got the perfect system and are doing everything right, but we're improving and making continuous improvement.

Perryman: What metrics are you using to measure the success of your DEI initiative?

DiPofi: The number one factor I look at is our employee engagement scores. Before we started our DEI initiative, those were probably in the high 70s and low 80s, but now they're in the high 80s. So that's the first thing I look at: how engaged employees are in the business. Then, I look at customer satisfaction. It's always very simple: if I have happy employees, they will do better work for the clients, and the clients will be more satisfied.

Then the turnover, how many people are leaving the company to go to my competition and we're doing way better than our competitors there. Those are business metrics that I look at and say the program is working.

When we started our focus, our total diversity was 25 percent, and now it's increased to, I think, 35 percent. There's been a substantial increase because we've widened the pool of people we are approaching and are thinking differently about it. For us, the demographics of this country demand that we attract a broader pool of people to come into it, and we're investing back into our community.

Perryman: Describe the impact on the community.

DiPofi: We're investing in our communities in STEM-related fields. We're working closely with Toledo Public Schools and a sponsor of Hawkins Elementary, a STEM-focused school. We're also working with The University of Toledo to counsel first-generation college students because we find, as you said, they get a scholarship, get good grades in high school, show up at college, and often, it's a foreign land for them. So, we've been focusing on first-year counseling and first-generation college students, who tend to be more diverse.

Perryman: Let me ask you this: how would your company respond if faced with external pressure from the administration to scale back or eliminate your DEI initiatives?

DiPofi: I'll tell you exactly what I told our employees. First of all, we have to comply with the law, whatever the law is, but since we never established quotas, we are already in compliance with the law. So, for us, there's no pushback. We already have a merit-based program that successfully attracts diverse populations, brings them into the company, and advances them.

This, then, is exactly my message: we're doing the right thing, we're doing things the right way, we're not going to change what we're doing.

Perryman: Final question. History is full of real "hidden figures," the Black engineers, scientists, mathematicians and inventors whose vital contributions are untold or erased from American history - figures from HBCUs like Jesse Eugene Russell, who revolutionized cell phone technology. Without Russell, there would be no wireless networks or cell phones.

Dr. Valerie Thomas created the technology that led to 3D imaging, without which there would be no virtual reality or advanced medical imaging equipment or procedures. Without Gladys West, GPS technology, Google Maps, or our automobiles' turn-by-turn directions would not exist.

Please discuss a "hidden figure" at SSOE in terms of DEI's tangible impact.

DiPofi: One key area I'd like to highlight is Artificial Intelligence (AI). One standout contributor to our AI efforts is Chelsea Kania. She is the Product Support Manager for our Technology group. Chelsea plays an essential role on the AI team.

I recently attended a full-day workshop with her and the AI team. Chelsea has demonstrated her deep expertise and has worked to vet the many AI suppliers to ensure data integrity. This committee reports directly to the CEO and works on AI technology, SSOE's highest priority. Chelsea was selected based on her broad understanding of technology at SSOE, which made her a natural fit for this high-priority initiative.

Contact Rev. Donald Perryman, PhD, at drdlperryman@enterofhopebaptist.org

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Qualified: How Competency Checking and Race Collide at Work by Shari Dunn

By Terri Schlichenmeyer

The Truth Contributor

Check your work.

When you were in school, you probably heard that a lot. Look over that math equation. Be sure your spelling is right. Reexamine your answers. Doing those things should result in rewards, then, right? Unless, as in the new business book, *Qualified* by Shari Dunn, someone's over-checking you.

c.2025
Harper Business
\$32.00
320 pages

In her experience as a consultant, Shari Dunn firmly acknowledges that being an employee is complicated and not-so-easy. For Black employees, though, there's additional level of difficulty, "competency checking," or the constant need to prove themselves and their intelligence. Says Dunn, the demand for competency checking can start before someone gets the job, sometimes merely with a name: studies show that employers who carry stereotypes, even subconsciously, favor resumes with so-called white-sounding names.

Historically speaking, Black workers have been fighting competency checking since they arrived on these shores 400 years ago. It shows in the words we use that sound innocent but that have dark origins. It shows in our foundational beliefs, ones that we don't often even know we have. It's embedded in white supremacy. And it shows up as a legacy of slavery and Jim Crow.

So what can employers do to ensure that their Black and Brown workers are welcome, and how do you make sure that the workplace works for them?

First, says Dunn, train yourself and your team to see and disrupt stereotypes, old tropes, and disbelief that skin color indicates competency – because it doesn't. Acknowledge that we do not and might never live in a "colorblind" world. Read up on history to understand where biases come from and how unions and apprenticeships have factored into competency checking in the past. Audit and evaluate your toolkit for any racial bias on a regular basis. Make the workplace a safe place for Black people to be authentic and to show the same emotions you'd allow white workers to display. Finally, offer support to all, and create a place for everyone, regardless of skin color, to thrive.

In her epilogue, author Shari Dunn explains to readers that *Qualified* was written in the middle of Joe Biden's presidency and final-edited after Kamala

Harris stepped up as the Democratic nominee for President, changes which are "head-spinning." Sadly, history has taken things further: Dunn extensively touches upon DEI policies in this book, and we all know how that's going.

Even so, despite the controversy, take a big-picture look: the entire basis of this book is essential reading, since it's aimed at businesses of all sizes, including (and especially) those that can't afford to turn away good workers. *Qualified* helps ensure that you find those workers, no matter what they look like, and that you make them happy and comfortable enough to want to stay; furthermore, easy-to-follow examples teach readers why maintaining diversity overall is important for growth, both personally and professionally.

A little reading between the lines will go a long way, when you have *Qualified*, but it's worth it. If you own a business and you it to grow, check it out.



Qualified author, courtesy Jason Hill

Civil Rights Trail... continued from page 11

now home to the National Civil Rights Museum.

The U.S. Civil Rights Trail is a collection of churches, courthouses, schools, museums and other landmarks primarily in the Southern states where activists challenged segregation in the 1950s and 1960s to advance social justice. Famous sites include the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama; Little Rock Central High School in Arkansas; the Greensboro, North Carolina, Woolworth's where sit-ins began; the National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee; and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthplace in Atlanta, Georgia, to name a few. The people, locations and destinations included in the Civil Rights Trail provide a way for families, travelers and educators to experience history firsthand. For details about the sites and stories from civil rights pioneers, visit CivilRightsTrail.com

You can explore the trail through an interactive map and even plan your own itinerary to visit these historic sites. It's a powerful way to experience the history and legacy of the Civil Rights Movement firsthand.

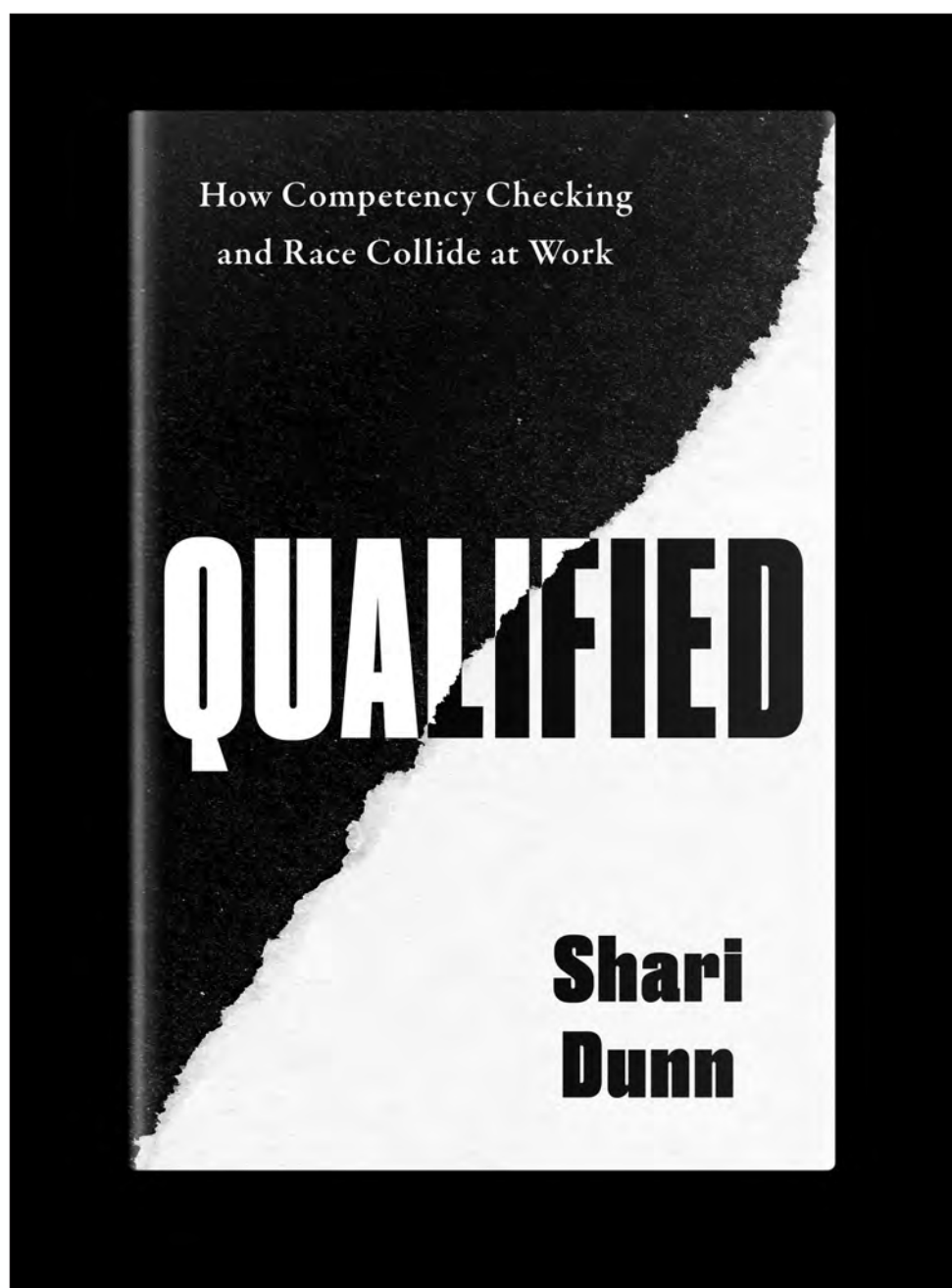


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Her Hub Luncheon... continued from page 7

WOT provides educational, advocacy and economic empowerment programs and since its founding has served 7,775 women and youth with its programs and services.

HerHub began in 2018 and has more than 200 members. According to its website, the group hopes “to encourage and build confidence for new women’s businesses and enhance & elevate the visibility of the existing women’s groups, businesses, and events by building a large, diverse, inclusive, comprehensive community of women supporting women.”

HerHub is certainly diverse. Among its members are over 30 Black-owned, women-owned companies offering food, fashion, flowers, candles, photography, consulting services, construction services, among others.

*African American Legacy... continued from page 8*

“We need action behind discussions,” said Nash. “Communication and coming together are important. Events happen outside of Toledo, that won’t come here. Talking is fine, but actions speak louder than words. You don’t always have to be the point person to make things happen. My daughter is taking the lead on college outreach and has her own team. I am passing on my knowledge and not just wealth.”

Attendees and panelists in attendance held a round robin discussion that touched on sharing of knowledge and resources, starting and supporting businesses and the importance of Black-owned businesses.

“We tend to keep stuff to ourselves. We have to share our knowledge,” explained Rich Hogan.

“We must come to the table and come together to determine community priorities. Anyone who wants to come to the table is welcome,” added Robert Smith.

“You can lead a horse to water but can’t make them drink. You must make them thirsty. We need to bring young folks and older folks together, we need to understand the motivations of each age group,” shared Jerome



Graham.

“Let’s talk about cross generational experience, it takes a village,” said Audrey Johnson. “We need to create a space to be in the create cross generational storytelling. We can create something that is simple, give conversation a chance.”

For additional information about African American Legacy Project of Northwest Ohio, visit <https://www.africanamericanlegacy.org/>

Coalition... continued from page 16

gin Rogers with the Political Action Award. These honorees also served as panelists for the evening’s discussion. Also recognized was an organization that shares the mission of the CBTU, the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC).

Baldemar Velasquez, president of FLOC, spoke about the importance of “uniting with one another since we are living in a very critical and pivotal moment in history, we should not allow people to lie to us and Black and Brown people need to struggle together instead of separately.”

Merrill has over 25 years experience in UAW and the USW manufacturing. His career is dedicated to labor, advocacy, leadership and community service. He advocates for diversity, equity and inclusion within the labor movement and he also serves on the UAW region veteran executive board and has served five years in the military.

Merrill spoke of the importance of DEI and what it stands for. He explained that diversity, equity and inclusion is a philosophy, culture, and set of practices that aim to make people feel welcomed and supported in all aspects of society. “Union education is key,” he added.

Dotson-Chambers, a community activist, is a local freedom fighter. She advocates for children and adults and is the contact person for the New Order Human Rights organization, Toledo chapter. She spoke out against injus-

tice in our community. She wants everyone to know: “don’t be afraid to do what’s right.”

Rogers represents Ohio House District 42. He was sworn into office for this current term, on January 1, 2025 by Ohio Supreme Court Justice Melody J Stewart.

Rogers is a graduate of Jesup W. Scott High School. He is an advocate for those fighting the realities of poverty, bad working conditions, health disparities and hopelessness. “I am thankful for the Coalition and the work they are doing in the community and all contributions to the fight against inequality,” he noted.

“The icing on the cake” as CBTU President Anita Madison described it, was a spoken word presentation by Jamele Walker that included the voice of Sojourner Truth along with entertainment provided by DJ Mpress (Moni Featchurs).

All of the honorees were presented with commemorative plaques and everyone posed for pictures after the banquet. A lot of information was shared during the event, and it was a night to remember, a number of attendees noted. Everyone was invited to join the movement and get together to become stronger together.



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The work on this project consists of the rehabilitation of the existing bridge on the Toledo-Lucas County Port Authority Facility 3 Access Road over the Bayshore power plant (First Energy) discharge channel. The contractor will be responsible for furnishing all labor, supervision, permits, equipment, shop drawings, tools, services, testing, and incidentals required to complete the work required by the bid documents, project technical specifications, project construction drawings and contract documents. The contractor will also be responsible for covering the cost of all materials except for the structures pre-purchased from Valmont and bearing pads and plates pre-purchased from others, as well as receiving the items when delivered and for all installation costs.

The engineer's estimate for the base bid is approximately \$1.2 million. Bids that are in excess of 10% above the engineer's estimate would be considered non-responsive. This project may be awarded by the Toledo-Lucas County Port Authority at its sole discretion.

Bids will be received through Bid Express, an online electronic bidding system, until Tuesday, March 18, 2025, at 10:00 AM, at which time all bids will be opened through the Bid Express website.

The plans and bid proposal documents are available to all prospective bidders in digital format via Bid Express at: <https://www.bidexpress.com/businesses/66075/home>. Bidders new to the electronic bidding system must first register on the Bid Express website (www.bidexpress.com). Registration is Free. It can take up to five (5) business days to process a Digital ID and it is highly recommended that a Digital ID be enabled 48 hours in advance of submitting an electronic bid. Bidders must plan accordingly. For additional guidance regarding electronic bidding, bidders must contact Bid Express directly. Each bidder shall be responsible for submitting its electronic bid before the bid deadline. Electronic Proposals must be submitted on the form(s) included in Bid Express and shall be accompanied by a certified check or an acceptable Proposal Bond with satisfactory surety specifying the Toledo Lucas County Port Authority as the obligee, in the sum of not less than ten percent (10%) of the total proposal amount.

Please note that there will be a pre-bid meeting for this project for all prospective bidders on Wednesday, March 5, 2025, at 9:00 AM, local time at the Port Authority's administrative offices at One Maritime Plaza, 7th floor conference room, Toledo, OH 43604. Attendance is suggested, but not mandatory. Please submit all questions through the Bid Express service by Monday, March 10, 2025, at 10:00 AM, local time. Questions submitted after the deadline will not receive a response. Additional information can be found at www.toledoport.org/projects/public-notice/

Thomas J. Winston
President and CEO
Toledo-Lucas County Port Authority

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- * Input financial transactions, donations, and membership contributions into the accounting system.
- * Generate vouchers for invoices and track payments to maintain financial accountability.
- * Process and record raffle ticket sales and membership contributions.
- * Assist in financial reporting, budget preparation, and data analysis to support strategic decision-making.
- * Manage and maintain financial records, reports, and presentations for the CFO.
- * Coordinate with internal departments to gather financial information and ensure compliance with reporting deadlines.
- * Support the CFO in monitoring financial policies, procedures, and regulatory compliance requirements.
- * Assist in preparing materials for board meetings and finance committee meetings.
- * Perform other administrative and support tasks as assigned to enhance the efficiency of the finance department.

Qualifications & Skills

- * Bachelor's degree in, Accounting, Business, Finance, or a related field preferred.
- * 3+ years of experience in accounting preferred.
- * Strong organizational and multitasking skills with keen attention to detail.
- * Proficiency in Microsoft Office Suite (Excel, Word) and financial software applications (Microsoft Dynamics SL preferred)

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Coalition of Black Trade Unionists Toledo Chapter 36th Black History Celebration

“Never backward, always forward: we will not be erased.”

By Emily Evans

The Truth Reporter

The Coalition of Black Trade Unionist Toledo Chapter's 36th annual Black History month celebration started off in an eloquent ambiance on Saturday, February 22 at Premier Banquet Hall. Dinner was served, people laughed and danced. Everyone was in high spirits and enjoyed the night.

The CBTU consists of members from 77 international and national unions with 42 chapters across the country. The Toledo chapter was organized in 1974. CBTU seeks to fulfill the dream of those Black trade unionists, both living and deceased, who throughout this century have courageously and unremittingly struggled to build a national movement that would bring all of our strengths and a varied talents to bear in the unending effort to achieve economic, political and social justice for every American.

The basic objectives of the CBTU to improve economic development and employment opportunities for Black workers, increase union involvement in voter registration, voter education and voter turnout projects. Organize un-organized workers, actively support civil rights and civic groups working to improve, living and working conditions in the Black community, increase effective political alliances between labor, churches and the general community.

Pierrette “Petee” Talley, was the moderator for the Saturday event. Elected in 2002 as Ohio AFL – CIO secretary- treasurer in 2019. She spoke about the importance of CBTU members to join organizations like FLOC - Farm Labor Organizing Committee.

The CBTU honored Siti Dotson-Chambers with the Community Service Award; Eddie Merrell, Jr. with the Trade Unionist Award and State Rep. El-

... continued on page 14



CBTU Executive Team Left to right: Jamele Walker, Recording Secretary; Anita Madison, President; Elbert Collier, Vice President; Janice Fryar, Sgt-at-arms; Petee Talley, Region 5 Representative; (n... See more



From Left to right: Eddie Merrell, Jr., Petee Talley, Siti Dotson-Chambers, Anita Madison (President), Baldemar Velasquez, State Representative Elgin Rogers, Elbert Collier Jr. (Vice President).



NAACP Toledo Youth Council served as our Hosts!!





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Sister - Jo Ann Campbell
Son - Cecil L. Holston II
Grandson - Myles Lennox Holston
Niece - Tasha Campbell
Great-niece - Tasharica Sanders
Great-niece - Tamýra Frazier