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New Orleans

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A Data News Weekly Exclusive

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Fatherhood Program Fights the Myth of the Absent Black Father



Darrell Creecy with his children, is the Program Manager of the Fathers Matter Program with Compassion Outreach of America. He works to empower fathers through networking and resource support.

Zoe Trask
Data News Weekly Contributor

Black fathers are plagued with the stereotype that they are often absent in their children’s lives. From a Western perspective, father absenteeism is usually determined if the father is not living in the same

household as his children. However, this concept is not entirely applicable for Black men. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2.5 million Black fathers actually live with their children, compared to 1.7 million who do not. Despite this, the stereotype is still widely believed. The reason for the stereotype’s existence is because it is en-

graved in America’s history. “The urban myth that is racialized comes from our legacy, which is slavery and Jim Crow,” said Sherdren Burnside, the Executive Director of Compassion Outreach of America, a New Orleans-based non-profit that supports community programs. Black fathers are seldom credited with having di-

Photos courtesy Dr. Bantu Gross, Darrell Creecy, and Sherdren Burnside

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DATA NEWS WEEKLY

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rect involvement with their children and are often penalized when they cannot support them financially. According to the We Raise Foundation, nearly half of all Black American children in New Orleans live in poverty due to their family's household income. In addition, according to economists, Black men experience the highest unemployment rates in the country, and unlike Black women they struggle to enter higher wage occupations, are less likely to be promoted and to be hired in high growth sectors.

In response to these challenges, Compassion Outreach of America launched their Fathers Matter Program in 2018 located at its resource center at 5234 N. Claiborne Ave. The Fathers Matter Program focuses on giving low-income men the resources to become whole-hearted fathers while developing their manhood.

"It's even deeper than money," said Bantu Gross, Ph.D., the Program Director of Fathers Matter. "There's other ways that men can provide, like emotional support or spiritual support," he added.



Dr. Bantu Gross with his daughter Nia and son Kalel, is the Program Director of the Fathers Matter Program with Compassion Outreach of America in New Orleans. He works to change perceptions around Black fathers and their involvement in their children's lives.

The Fathers Matter Program provides resources and forums for fathers to develop. Through its weekly "Dad Discussions" every

Thursday night, men explore topics like self-awareness, trauma, tragedy, and employment. The resources are free because of the

program's commitment to accessibility. Even during the current COVID-19 Pandemic, the discussions continue and are now held online

to accommodate health guidelines. Participants must register online for a discussion from the program's website and are sent a link to access weekly meetings moderated by the program directors.

"Everything that we have been doing is very impactful, because men have gained a sense of brotherhood," said Darrell Creecy, the Program Manager of Fathers Matter.

The program aims to give Black men a positive outlook on fatherhood and encourages healthy development in their children for generations to come. Black fathers are being supported with their involvement to change stereotypes about them and to recreate their own image. Creecy said he believes that with the program's influence, Black men are becoming aware that a fatherly presence is needed for their children and they are more committed to fatherhood now than in the past.

"There's becoming a shift of Black men standing upon the involvement of their children's lives," Creecy said.



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For more information about the 2020 Census, visit 2020Census.gov or call 844-330-2020.

#2020Census #CountAllKids

A Hawk's Eye for Fashion



Tracee Dundas
Fashion Stylist

Like most African American households in the '50's and '60's clothes were often acquired as "hand-me-downs" from a sibling, or the skillset of sewing was taught by the family matriarchs; the mother and grandmother.

Such was the case for veteran designer, Gwen Hawkins. Her journey as a fashion designer started at the young age of 8, when her grandmother placed her behind a sewing machine and taught her the basics of sewing as a necessity. Later as a teenager she began to take note of models like Grace Jones and Twiggy admiring their poise and style as she thumbed through fashion magazines. However, it wasn't just the models that caught Ms. Hawkins attention, the fashions spoke to her as well; fueling her interest to design fashion. One of Ms. Hawkins fondest memories is a time in high school when she was suspended from school and told not to come back until she learned how to dress. Ms. Hawkins didn't take this as a negative but rather a positive message that her fashion style was not cookie cutter.

Today she not only mentors and teaches sewing to high school students but also has an impressive list of accolades. That doesn't mean the work came easily. As a successful entrepreneur, sustaining her brick and mortar boutique (Gwen's Bridal Boutique), for over 20 years and then evolving her own fashion brand; (Designs by G), she is the first to say it was not an easy feat. Pointing out that there's been many hiccups in her journey, but none has stopped her from forging ahead. Ms. Hawkins says, "without the failures there can be no success".

Ms. Hawkins has enjoyed many fashion moments over the years; from appearing in J.E.T. Magazine as a swimsuit model; to dressing Mardi Gras and Beauty Queens to showcasing her collection at New Orleans Fashion Week (2017-2019), and adding to that list is the honor and privilege of designing Mayor LaToya Cantrell's dress for her swearing-in as well as her inaugural ballgown. This was her Ann Lowe moment.

Fashion Stylist: Tracee Dundas | @



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Designer Gwen Hawkins finale' walk at NOFW9 with model Niricha Williams.



Mayor Cantrell at Swearing-In Ceremony wearing dress designed by Gwen Hawkins.



New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell address supporters at Inaugural Ball wearing gown designed by Gwen Hawkins.

fashionablyyoursnola, PHOTO CREDIT: PHOTOGRAPHER Eduardo Benitez | New Orleans Fashion Week Runway Photos, Mayor LaToya Cantrell Photos Courtesy of Gwen Hawkins

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UNCF Pulls off Virtual Annual Walk with Celebrity Support

Kelsyn Parker
Data News Weekly
Contributor

The United Negro College Fund adapted its Annual National Walk for Education to a virtual format given the COVID-19 Pandemic, in support of its mission to raise funds for students at Historically Black Universities and Colleges. Celebrities and students alike joined the event to aid the UNCF in raising funds needed to accomplish the goal of empowering African American students through educational scholarships.

"Tuition and the cost of living continue to rise while rampant social injustice and now COVID-19 wreak havoc on thousands of lives," said Shaquille O'Neal, the former Professional Basketball Player and Hall of Famer. "It could seem [like] a pretty bleak time to pursue your dreams, but the great news is UNCF and its Historically Black Colleges and Universities are helping to change the narrative and shrink the gap of educational injustice for many deserving young men and women by helping them get the education they need," O'Neal said while prompting the audience to donate to the cause of the UNCF.

O'Neal joined other celebrities like Grammy-Winning Recording



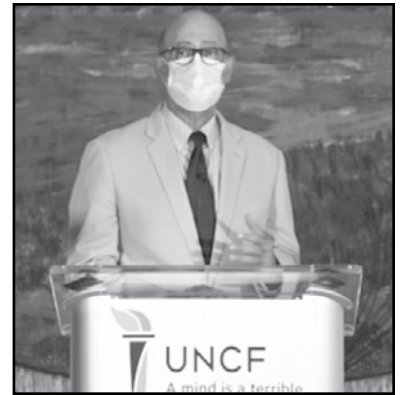
Alia Scott, a junior at Wiley College, shared her gratitude towards the United Negro College Fund.



Lynn Whitfield, an Emmy Award Winning Actress, encouraged viewers to help support the future leaders of America through donations to the United Negro College Fund.



Shaquille O'Neal, the former Professional Basketball Player, rallied for donor support to help HBCU students achieve in school.



Michael Lomax, President of United Negro College Fund, thanked donors for their support to help HBCU students achieve a higher education.



Recording Artist Anthony Hamilton sang his hit song, "Charlene," at the National UNCF Walk for Education.

Artist Anthony Hamilton, Emmy-Winning Actress Lynn Whitfield, and Actor-Comedian Jonathan Slocumb to encourage annual giving

to the UNCF. However, celebrities weren't the only ones highlighting the benefits of contributing funds to the organization.

"I honestly believe if I hadn't gotten the [UNCF] scholarship, I wouldn't have been able to complete my semesters successfully," said Brionna McGhee, a sophomore at Xavier University of Louisiana. "I know that since I've been here [at Xavier], I've met so many great people that have connected me to so many opportunities that I probably would not have gotten anywhere else," McGhee said when speaking on the impact on receiving a scholarship from the UNCF.

Gratefulness towards the acts of

the UNCF from students transcended Louisiana's state lines into neighboring Texas during the virtual event. "I had different expectations for college. I thought that college was more of a swim-with-the-sharks experience," said Alia Scott, a junior at Wiley College in Marshall, Texas. "Attending a UNCF school definitely made it easier for me and other students because you can see the difference at how they support you and work with you versus just leaving you," Scott said when comparing UNCF schools to those not under the UNCF brand.

Despite the social restrictions and high levels of unemployment in the Black community as a result

of job loss due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the organization noted that their mission is even more important at this time to ensure Black students can afford a college education.

"We at UNCF are more determined than ever that our talented and deserving students will get the important, vital resources necessary to help them earn their college degrees that they need to succeed," said Michael Lomax, Ph.D., the President of United Negro College Fund.

"Without them, we are lost," he said. "HBCUs and its students are persevering, but they still need our support."

Commentary

The USPS is a National Cornerstone



Royce Duplessis
Louisiana State
Representative – District 93

When I was in the 4th grade, I did a social studies project on the United States Postal Service. It was called, "The Life of a Letter." Since that time, I have always been fascinated by the mission and logistics operation of the U.S. Postal Service. The U.S. Postal Service is a critical piece of our national and global infrastructure.



State Representative Royce Duplessis as a 4th grader where he did a social studies project on the United States Postal Service. It was called, "The Life of a Letter." In this time where it has become a flashpoint in this election he advocates for its importance and investment in more resources for the U.S. Postal Service.

After having me, my mother began working night shifts as



a Letter Sorting Machine Operator at the New Orleans Main

Post Office. She worked her way up the ranks to enjoy a success-

ful career until her retirement after 27 years.

Personal stories aside, the current attack on the U.S. Postal Service poses devastating threats not only to our upcoming elections, but to our way of life. Seniors depend on it for medicine. Small businesses rely on it to reach customers. It is a lifeline for rural communities. For my family, and so many other families across America, it is a symbol of security and advancement. For the Postal workforce, it symbolizes pride and a commitment to service. It is also a symbol that transcends party politics.

Now, more than ever, we must protect and preserve the integrity of institutions like the United States Postal Service.

Biden Campaign & DNC Announce New Vote-By-Mail Features on IWillVote.com

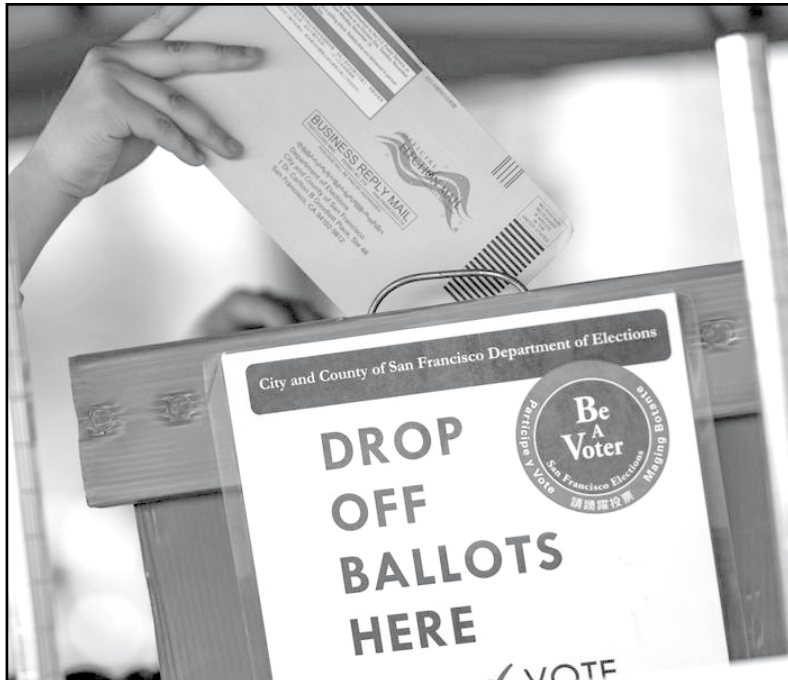
Stacy M. Brown
NNPA Newswire Senior
National Correspondent

Recently, the Joe Biden for President Campaign and the Democratic National Committee (DNC) have announced new features on IWillVote.com – the DNC's voter participation website – that will help voters easily request and return their ballot by mail.

According to the campaign, the site will also help visitors learn important information about the voting process in their state as they make their plan to vote.

Previously, an individual could use the site to check or update their registration and find voting locations. The new user experience will also guide a voter through their best voting-by-mail option based on their state and county regulations, including:

- Requesting a ballot online. A voter will be directed to their state's online vote-by-mail request form.
- Requesting a ballot by email. A voter completes a vote-by-mail



request form, including uploading a picture of their signature (where required), on com. The form is automatically emailed to the state.

- Printing and mailing their request. A voter completes a vote-

by-mail request form on com. The voter then prints, signs, and mails the request form to the state.

- Requesting a prepaid return envelope: A voter completes a vote-by-mail request form on com and

requests a prepaid return envelope. The voter will then receive their completed request form via mail to sign and return in a prepaid return envelope.

Additionally, IWillVote.com has been updated with new state-specific voter education pages and resources – to help voters easily find their states' deadlines to vote by mail, early, or in person, as well as other important information about their states' voting process.

"How ever voters choose to cast their ballots, these updates to the IWillVote.com site provide the tools necessary to exercise their right to participate in our democracy and ensure our community's voice is heard in this critical election," said DNC National Press Secretary Brandon Gassaway.

"Our lives and our livelihoods are at stake this November, and we're doing everything in our power to ensure every voter has all the information they need to make a plan to vote and send Joe Biden and Kamala Harris to the White House," Gassaway declared.

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