

Inside

Mariah Howard Champions Global Growth With Cleveland at the Center

Cleveland is more than a city; it's a launchpad.

"Do your part where you are, with what you have," Howard said. "That's how you make the world better, and that's how Cleveland leads the way."

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True West Homes: Small Nonprofit Making a Big Impact



Scan to Listen

By Mary Kate McNamee

True West Homes is a small nonprofit based in Cleveland, that helps individuals exiting homelessness get back on their feet. Founded by Sheri West in 2018, the organization remains under her leadership today, with West serving as executive director.

The Birth of a New Era

West says she always wanted to help people, but struggled to find an outlet, until she experienced homelessness herself.

"Once I was in the shelter, I didn't know I had an epiphany," West said. "I was like, you know what, I would like to help people who are trying to exit the homeless shelter, find housing that's safe, secure, and affordable, so they



Founder Sheri West of True West Homes, a small Cleveland-based nonprofit

won't have to go through the challenges and struggles that I've gone through."

True West Homes provides individuals with a support system, helping them recover through compassion, connection, and care.

From a Vision to a Mission

True West Homes' long-term goal is to help individuals leaving shelters find affordable housing, but such housing remains scarce.

"Since we are not at that point yet, I decided I still wanted to help these individuals," West said. "So I started a Housing Stability Support Program. When they find permanent housing, we help with essential items and financial assistance."

True West Homes provides these individuals with assistance so they don't have to choose between paying rent and buying groceries.

"If they're going through any type of crisis like that, when True West Homes comes in to assist them with basic need items like bus passes, gas, car repairs, food assistance, and we also help them financially, partial payment of their rent, utilities..." West said.

West emphasized the organization's commitment to the underserved, those facing social

and economic disadvantage.

"We not only want to help individuals who are exiting the homeless shelter, but help anybody who is socially, economically disadvantaged," West said. "All walks of life, seniors, veterans, individuals, families, anybody, but until we get the funds to do that, we can only help so many people right now."

We Are All in This Together

True West Homes has not only served individuals but has also helped other nonprofits. The YWCA of Greater Cleveland has collaborated with the organization since 2020. Like True West Homes, the YWCA supports those in need, including individuals overcoming homelessness and other life crises.

Kathy Harris, clinical director of the Norma Herr Women's Center, spoke about the partnership.

"True West Homes has served about 214 of our guests. The ladies are sheltered at the

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Custom Vinyls and Custom Sounds: Wax Mage Records Is Here to Stay



By Devon Jones



Scan to Listen

Music moves the body and soothes the soul. For some, rhythm is the purest form of self-expression. In this day and age, while originality fades into algorithmic sameness, artistry endures with purpose and pleasure.

As culture and technology evolve, the value of music remains constant. This article is about music and about Wax Mage Records and their work to preserve the art of sound in Cleveland and beyond. We often fail to recognize the gems closest to us.

What are Wax Mage Records and Gotta Groove Records?

Wax Mage Records is a locally owned record label and custom vinyl pressing service based in Cleveland's Midtown neighborhood. Wax Mage Records was founded in 2012 by Heath

Gmucs while he was working at Gotta Groove Records.

While working at Gotta Groove, Heath started with small custom record orders that quickly grew in size and frequency.

By 2018, Wax Mage had become a signature product line of Gotta Groove Records, evolving into its custom printing department. In the same year, Tyren Craemer and Heath Gmucs became official business partners, expanding Wax Mage into a record label.

Their mission is to empower local artists. Heath and Tyren curate unique experiences through custom vinyl records and promotional services.

Through this service, local artists can sell custom records alongside standard vinyl as part of their music release plans.

How Do Vinyl Records Work?

Vinyl records can transport listeners. Depending on your generation, they can take you back to a time when things were simple and music was something you could feel: when art was physical.

As technology advances,



Wax Mage Records business partners Heath Gmucs (left) and Tyren Craemer (right), and Giovanna Taylor (center) Credit Devon Jones

the tacit elements of art fade, but vinyl records are making a powerful comeback. Not only do vinyl records move the listener, but the music itself moves—literally—through physical grooves. As explained by Everpresent:

"When you play a vinyl record, a needle (stylus) traces the tiny hills and valleys in the spiral groove on the record's surface.

As the needle moves, it

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‘Squash the Beef’ Serves Southern Comfort Food With a Plant-Based Twist



By Angela Hay

At Squash the Beef in GlenVillage on East 105th Street, Chef Kurtis Williams crafts plate after eye-catching plate of comfort food while a relaxed DJ set plays nearby.

On the menu are giant burgers, hand-cut fries, nuggets, and overstuffed sandwiches. He prepares the kind of hearty, filling meals you want to savor after a long day at work or when spending time with friends.

This comfort food, however, is carefully crafted to nourish both body and soul.

From Crisis to Cuisine

Eight years ago, Williams and his partner, Candace Maiden, watched the documentary ‘What the Health’, which explores how corporate influence harms public health. Both struggled with health issues, and Williams had recently lost his mother to food-related illnesses.

“We began to recognize that a plant-based diet could help with things like high blood pressure, cholesterol, and diabetes,” Maiden said.

They switched to a plant-based diet overnight, starting with simple meals like rice, beans, vegetables, and fruit. However, they faced challenges, including cravings and social difficulties.

“People stopped inviting us places,” Maiden said. “They’d say, ‘You guys are plant-based, I don’t know what to feed you.’”

Determined, Williams began experimenting with plant-



“Squash The Beef” patners, Candace Maiden and Chef Kurtis Williams

based recipes. Soon, friends were surprised by how flavorful the food was. “They’d say, ‘Oh, my God! This tastes better than the real food!’”

Turning a Passion into a Business

Williams and Maiden turned their plant-based lifestyle into a business venture after Williams, an unknown chef, took first place at a vegan chili cook-off. “It was almost unanimous how many votes he got,” Maiden said. “We’re like, ‘Wow, number one.’ People remarked on how good the food is, saying, ‘I couldn’t even tell that it was vegan.’”

Their first big event, Cleveland VegFest in 2019, marked a turning point as they sold their award-winning chili and comfort rolls—eggroll-like bundles filled with soul food favorites like sweet potatoes and mac and cheese. This success led them to cater events, weddings, and festivals.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, they pivoted by

launching a Honeycomb Credit campaign to purchase a food buggy.

“We started strategizing that there were still a lot of people who didn’t have access to plant-based foods,” Maiden said. They raised \$30,000 and began serving neighborhoods classified as food deserts.

“We have to recognize that there are, in the African American community, a lot of health challenges that are not necessarily inherited,” Maiden said, explaining how diets rooted in history contribute to health disparities. Their goal is to show that healthy vegan eating is for everyone, not just affluent communities.

At the upcoming Taste of Black Cleveland event on July 31, Squash the Beef will return as last year’s vegan category winner, celebrating the rich intersection of culture and health. “Veganism comes in all shapes and sizes,” Maiden said.

The Future of Squash the Beef

Looking ahead, Williams and Maiden hope to move beyond GlenVillage, an incubator for new businesses, into a larger, permanent location. To make that happen, they’ve applied for the Cleveland Chain Reaction competition, which offers a \$40,000 small business grant. They were finalists in the competition last year and were recently selected for Season 8.

They also hope to partner with grocery stores to sell their unique lemonades, comfort sauce, and homemade nut-free cheese sauce.

Most importantly, they’ll continue to share their passion for delicious, healthy food with anyone willing to try some.

“Check out a plant-based restaurant, support a plant-based



“Squash The Beef” dream team (left to right). Kurtis Williams Sr., Naima Maiden Williams, Geremiah Stokes, Candace Maiden and Chef Kurtis Williams.

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business,” Maiden said. “There’s such a need for it. Hopefully, we can start to make plant-based just as mainstream as the American standard diet.”

Angela Hay is a journalism student at Capital University (Class of 2025) and a Cleveland Observer intern dedicated to highlighting fresh voices and untold stories from Greater Cleveland.

Cleveland’s Haven Home Breaks the Cycle of Poverty



By Evelyn Rossman

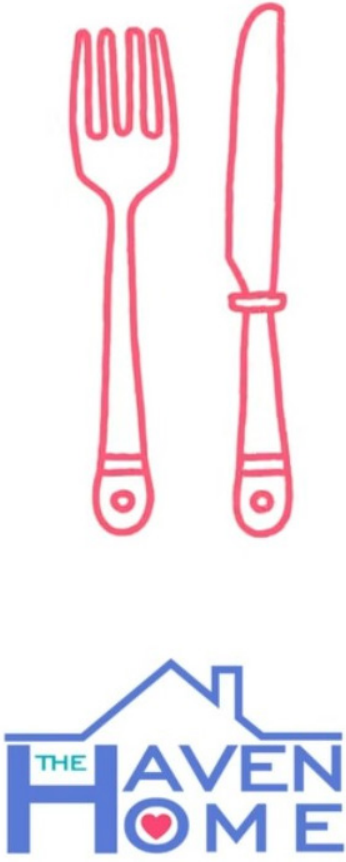
The A Refuge for Women and Children

The Haven Home, a faith-based nonprofit women’s shelter in the heart of Cleveland, provides housing, food, and education for unhoused women and their young children. Located on East 61st Street near the Opportunity Corridor, the shelter can house 10 to 14 women and their children under age five for up to one year. In addition to food and shelter, women receive tailored classes on topics such as parenting, healthy relationships, and self-care. “It’s a really intimate view into how transformative the time can be,” said Christine Hill, a former Haven Home art teacher. “Physically, I could see them transforming—gaining confidence in their parenting abilities, gaining confidence in having a voice.” The Haven Home’s mission is to break the cycle of homelessness through stability



SNAP-Ed Facilitator, Laylah Allen shared information about eating healthy balanced meals with families at The Haven Home. Credit The Haven Home Instagram

and empowerment. Most residents leave with employment or education plans in place. “It sometimes keeps me up at night,” said Executive Director Cynthia Rios, “because I feel very responsible for the people we serve and the people we employ.”



their Medicaid coverage, while the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities estimates that 450,000 Ohioans could lose SNAP benefits. **Nonprofits Face Rising Demand, Fewer Resources**

Although the Haven Home does not receive direct federal funding, it relies on donations from organizations that do. Rios said one longtime supporter that typically donates \$10,000 annually recently lost its government funding. “It’s definitely going to strain the system,” Rios said. “People are going to reach out to other nonprofits, to other service providers to try to get what they need, while we’re still trying to get what we need. It just rolls downhill.”

How You Can Help

As public support shrinks, community engagement becomes more important than ever. You can help The Haven Home by volunteering or donating.

Donate: <https://thehavenhome.org/donate/>
Volunteer: <https://thehavenhome.org/volunteering/>

Evelyn is a journalism intern at The Cleveland Observer and a student at Boston College, specializing in narrative writing and culture reporting. She is fluent in German and brings experience as both a tutor and culture writer.



Federal Cuts Threaten Vital Services

The Trump administration’s proposed budget, announced in late May and set to take effect October 1, includes deep cuts to government social programs. These include the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), Medicaid, and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). “Under this proposal, breastfeeding mothers would see their monthly benefits plummet from \$52 to just \$13, while young children’s benefits would drop from \$26 to \$10,” said Georgia Machell, president and CEO of the National WIC Association, in an interview with NJ Spotlight News. Trump’s “One Big Beautiful Bill,” signed into law on July 4, aims to offset sweeping tax cuts by limiting eligibility and reducing funding for Medicaid and SNAP. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, at least 400,000 Ohioans could lose

Right to Counsel Continues to Help Those Facing Eviction in Cleveland



By Tonya Sams

For many years, Cleveland tenants facing eviction had no right to legal representation. That changed on July 1, 2020, when the city enacted its Right to Counsel (RTC) ordinance. Cleveland became the first city in the Midwest and only the fourth in the United States to

provide such a right. Five years later, RTC continues to ensure that Cleveland tenants have access to legal representation in eviction cases and has helped thousands of families stay housed. Tenants are eligible for RTC if they live in Cleveland, have a minor child in the home, and fall at or below federal poverty guidelines. Legal Aid Society attorneys represent them in court, help them present their side, and advocate for outcomes aligned with their goals. **More Than 5,000 Evictions Are Filed Each Year in Cleveland.** “Evictions harm Cleveland

neighborhoods. They disrupt neighborhood stability. They hurt children who have to change schools suddenly. Families often lose their belongings when they’re forced to move quickly. Childcare, transportation arrangements, family support systems, and access to employment opportunities all can be broken by a sudden move,” said **Barbara Reitzloff**, a supervising attorney in the Housing Practice Group at Legal Aid. “Legal representation through RTC makes it more likely that the tenant can stay in their home, or work out an agreement to move on a more reasonable

timetable.” Since 2020, Legal Aid has served more than 4,500 tenants through RTC. Of those, 80% achieved outcomes that met their goals. The eviction process moves quickly. In Cleveland, Court dates can happen within days of the tenant receiving court papers. If the court rules against the tenant, they may have as few as seven days to move. If the tenant doesn’t move, the landlord may hire private movers to set the tenant’s belongings on the tree lawn. *Continue on page 5*

Will Tariffs Raise My Grocery Bill? Understanding Their Impact on Prices



By Evelyn Rossman

Since his second inauguration, President Donald Trump has prioritized higher tariffs as a tool for promoting U.S. businesses and reducing the country’s dependence on foreign goods, prompting a range of responses and criticisms from people across the political spectrum.

So far, Trump’s ever-changing tariffs have had a marginal impact on grocery prices for consumers, but future price stability is far from guaranteed.

Tariffs, what are they good for?

A tariff is a tax imposed by the government on foreign goods. President Donald Trump aims to use broad tariffs as a tool to decrease the federal trade deficit. A deficit occurs when the U.S. spends more money on exports than it makes on imports, prompting the country to borrow money from foreign nations.

The U.S. Census reported a deficit of over \$900 billion in 2024. Some economists argue that trade deficits foster global



dream.”
TTrump also seeks to use tariffs as leverage in trade negotiations. Historically, U.S. tariffs averaged 1% to 3% throughout the 21st century. Under Trump, the projected average tariff rate for 2025 is 14.5%.

Juscelino Colares, professor at Case Western Reserve University School of Law, says higher tariffs give the U.S. more negotiating power. “[Trump is] an Excel spreadsheet person,” Colares

30% and 10%, respectively. On July 7, Trump announced that more than two dozen nations—including Canada, Mexico, and Japan—must broker new trade agreements with the U.S. or face tariffs up to 50% starting August 1.

Since then, Trump has posted letters on social media outlining tariff plans for various countries. Whether these plans will change before the deadline remains uncertain. “This strategy of negotiation is very disruptive, and it creates a lot of uncertainty for businesses,” Colares said.

Consumers face an uncertain future

Someone ultimately pays the cost of tariffs. Trump has claimed foreign nations bear the cost, but many economists argue that consumers end up shouldering the burden.

So far, businesses have largely absorbed tariff-related costs. “A lot of companies are not passing the cost on to consumers... because they think they’re going to come down, that Trump’s going to change his mind again,” New York Times columnist David Brooks told NPR. “So why burn their

relationship with consumers if Trump might pull the tariffs back?”

Inflation driven by tariffs has slightly increased consumer prices, but future impacts remain unclear. Brooks warned that if high tariffs persist, companies may begin transferring costs to consumers.

Joe Pacetti, general manager at Heinen’s in Downtown Cleveland, said the grocery chain hasn’t made any firm pricing decisions due to the unpredictability of tariffs. He identified coffee, imported wine, and out-of-season produce as most vulnerable to price hikes.

“It’s kinda hard to say [how prices will change] right now,” Pacetti said. “We just have to take it as it comes.”

Marketing managers at Heinen’s and Dave’s Market did not respond to requests for comment.

Evelyn Rossman is a journalism intern at The Cleveland Observer and a student at Boston College, specializing in narrative writing and culture reporting. She is fluent in German and brings experience as both a tutor and culture writer.



economic integration, while others say overdependence on foreign countries is unsustainable and poses security risks.

Trump believes tariffs will promote domestic industries, especially manufacturing jobs historically outsourced to countries like China. Trump and his supporters state that foreign nations have an unfair advantage over the U.S.

“Foreign leaders have stolen our jobs,” Trump said on Liberation Day. “Foreign cheaters have ransacked our factories, and foreign scavengers have torn apart our once beautiful American

said. “It’s all numbers.”

Tariff rates continually fluctuate

Trump’s tariffs have shifted rapidly. After a month-long delay, he imposed a 15% tariff on Canada and Mexico and a 10% tariff on China on March 4. On April 2, dubbed “Liberation Day,” he expanded these tariffs by introducing a 10% baseline on all imports and additional tariffs on select countries.

China retaliated with a 125% tariff on U.S. goods in response to Trump’s 145% tariff on Chinese imports. These were eventually reduced to

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Custom Vinyls and Custom Sounds: From front page

vibrates. Those vibrations are converted by the cartridge into electrical signals, which are then amplified and sent to speakers, producing the sounds you hear.”

What Makes Wax Mage Records So Special?

Vinyl once dominated the musical landscape, but streaming platforms now lead the industry.

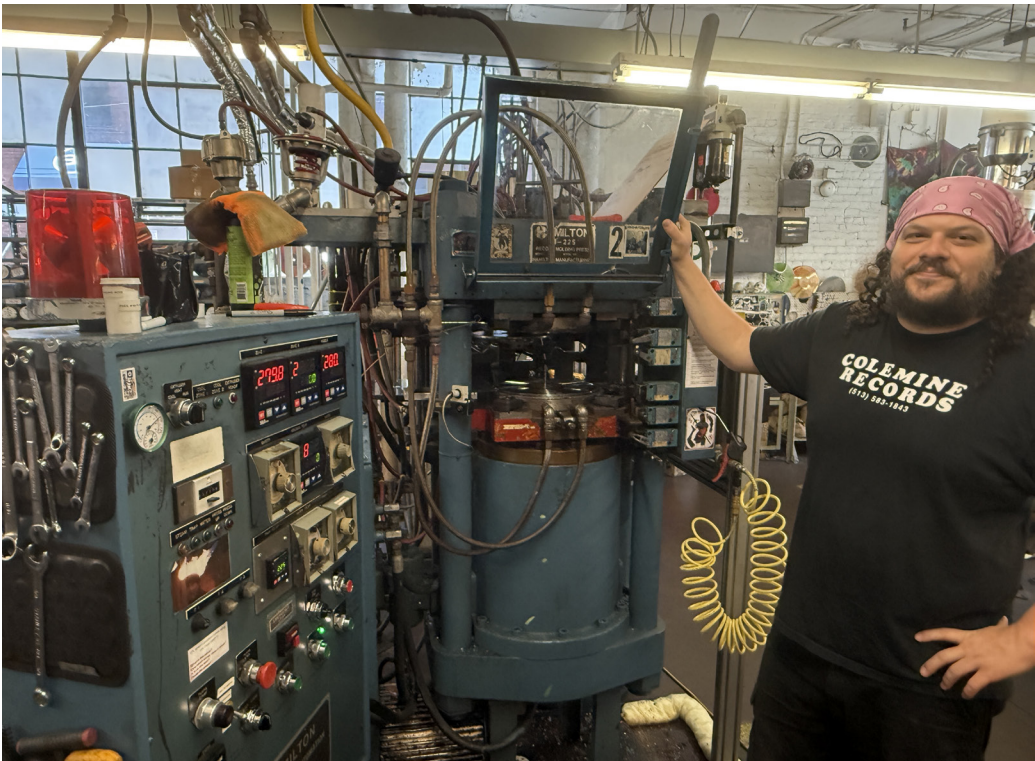
For some artists and music lovers, however, the need to have a tacit connection to the creation has remained. Artists and fans brought vinyl records back, and they are more popular than ever.

To date, factories nationwide continue to press vinyl records by older groups such as The Beatles, a testament to the format’s lasting demand.

As this market has surged, Wax Mage Records stands out by crafting one-of-a-kind custom records designed to reflect each artist’s identity and sound.

These custom-designed records are handcrafted and then mass-produced.

Wax Mage Records and Gotta Groove Records operate an industry-standard vinyl manufacturing process, ensuring



Midtown Neighborhood. Wax Mage Records, founded in 2012 by Heath Gmucs, pictured here standing next to a vinyl record press machine.Credit Devon Jones

that every record they press is both appealing and built to last.

But beyond the process, it’s their commitment to creativity, community, and Cleveland’s musical soul that sets them apart.

Whether you’re an artist looking to release your next project, or a listener who loves music you can hold, Wax Mage has what you need and is here to stay.

More About the Owners

As a local business, Wax Mage Records emerged from humble beginnings. Neither owner intended to land in this profession, but they have always had a connection to music.

Heath was born and raised in Cleveland and came from a musical family where everyone played instruments. As a result, Heath followed suit and became a professional musician. When asked what music could do for the world, Heath said:

“Music connects people. You have something to relate to other people with its power. Different genres can speak at different times and experiences in people’s lives.”

Tyren Craemer, known as Ty, was born and raised in Orrville, Ohio. Ty came from a family of dairy farmers but always had a passion for music. When asked what music could do for the world,

Ty said:
“Art is a connecting factor. The incorporeal nature of art connects people and creates a unique experience for each person. The intention behind the music tends to be inconsequential in comparison to the experience it brings.”

Call to Action: Support the Art. Celebrate the Process. Join the Movement.

In a world that moves fast and often forgets its roots, Wax Mage Records reminds us that music is more than sound—it’s a shared experience, a crafted story, and a tangible piece of culture.

Whether you’re an artist seeking to elevate your next release or a listener craving something real, your support helps keep this legacy alive.

So, the next time you’re choosing how to experience music, consider doing it with intention. Explore Wax Mage. Buy the record. Hold the art in your hands, because here in Cleveland, artistry still matters, and Wax Mage Records is here to stay.

True West Homes: From front page



Founder Sheri West of True West Homes, a small Cleveland-based nonprofit that supports individuals transitioning out of homelessness. (Credit: TCO Staff Photographer)

Norma Herr Women’s Center. They’ve supported them with gift cards, supplies, and household items when those guests move out of the shelter and into their own apartments or homes,” Harris said.

She noted that many guests leave the shelter with few belongings. True West Homes provides the tangible items they need to stabilize their lives.

“They have been very supportive when we have applied for help. The response has always been immediate and generous,” Harris said.

These everyday items may seem small, they are critical to help sustain an individual’s life after leaving homeless shelters.

A Firsthand Testimonial

One recipient of True West Homes’ support shared her experience:

“In order to move into my new unit, I needed to get

the utilities in my name and transferred over. I didn’t have the funds to pay my past due balances, and that was keeping me and my baby from moving in. True West helped me with money on my gas bill so that I could move in and not stay another night in my car,” Kristine L wrote.

True West Homes continues to make a powerful impact in Cleveland, proving that even a small nonprofit can drive big change.

Mary Kate McNamee is a student at Ohio University studying English Literature and history. She writes for the news and human interest section of her school paper and is interning at The Cleveland Observer for the summer.

Right to Counsel Continues to Help Those Facing Eviction in Cleveland From page 3

Fortunately, attending eviction hearings in Cleveland has become easier.

“Since the pandemic, eviction hearings are held on Zoom. This is helpful because the tenant doesn’t have to worry about transportation to the Justice Center, the cost of parking, or arranging for child care,” Reitzloff said.

Legal Help Can Make the Difference

Having an Attorney is Important. “We’ve learned from RTC that you are likely to get a better result with an attorney than without one,” said Reitzloff. “An attorney can help get a tenant more time to move, or they may be able to stop the eviction completely. An attorney may be

able to protect housing subsidy, which can lost, if the court grants an eviction judgment against the tenant.”

Cleveland tenants facing eviction can call 216-861-5835 or apply online at FreeEvictionHelp.org.

For help with other housing matters, visit lasclev.org/apply or call 888-817-3777.

Tonya Sams is a development and communications manager at The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland.

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Development Projects: Double-Edge Sword That Can Build or Break a City



By Mary Kate McNamee

Recent development projects in Cleveland continue to foster growth and revitalize aging neighborhoods. While these projects often take years to complete, their impact can be transformative for struggling communities, but not without potential downsides.

Behind the Scenes of Development Projects

Josh John Forbes, Marketing and Communications Director of the Cleveland Neighborhood Progress, spoke with TCO about their nonprofit’s work for the community:

“We are a nonprofit, supporting the community development ecosystem within the city of Cleveland,” Forbes said, “Our goal is to foster revitalization in all neighborhoods of Cleveland by strengthening those community development organizations.”

Cleveland Neighborhood Progress has been around since 1988 and has seen many development projects.

Working Together

Cleveland Neighborhood Progress works in collaboration with neighborhood community development corporations (CDC).

“The neighborhood CDCs usually set priorities for the neighborhoods, whether it’s more affordable housing, or development on an empty lot, or development for small businesses,” Forbes said.

Cleveland Neighborhood Progress then provides the grant-making, lending, and real estate expertise to execute these development projects.

One recent effort involved Shaker Square, a historic shopping center at the intersection of Shaker and Moreland boulevards.

Cleveland Neighborhood Progress worked with Burten, Bell, Carr, and FASS Real Estate Services to honor the space they were working with. All organizations ensured the square had a local owner rather than an out-of-state owner.

“We’ve been re-investing in the property through capital projects...that’s new plumbing, new roofing, installing an elevator, things of that nature,” Forbes said. “Those were all really important projects to make sure the square can continue to function and serve its main role, which is supporting



Artisan Luxury Living. 10600 Chester Ave Cleveland, OH 44106 216) 480-7016. Credit: Instagram

local businesses.”

Negative Side Effects of Developmental Work

Despite their benefits, development projects can also lead to gentrification and displacement.

Andrew Lee, writer and author of Defying Displacement: ‘Urban Recomposition and Social War’, emphasized the risks of development that targets only affluent newcomers.

“We have academic studies that demonstrate that the construction of luxury condos or luxury houses or housing that’s marketed towards this sort of gentrifying class of professional workers actually increases housing costs for working-class residents in the vicinity,” Lee said.

When new luxury homes are constructed, this can often harm the current residents of that community, as they may be pushed out of their homes due to rising costs.

“Displacement is people being forced to leave an area for reasons outside of their control,” Lee said. “We’re seeing massive amounts of people being pushed out of these communities to be replaced by entirely distinct groups of people.”

With the Best Intentions- Intentions Matter

Lee stressed that the purpose of development is essential to whether it ultimately helps or harms the community.

“Is it really development if it benefits the municipality in the sense of the political and economic institutions, but harms the municipality,” Lee said?

“If we look at the people who actually live there, if we’re talking about the development of Cleveland, what is the development that actually advances the interests of the majority of people who are living there?”

Development projects have the risk of potentially

hurting or helping a community, ultimately depending on whom the development project is for.

Downtown Cleveland, another nonprofit focused on city revitalization, supports inclusive development through investments, advocacy, and services.

Audrey Gerlach, chief operating officer and executive vice president of Downtown Cleveland explained that in terms of housing, Cleveland provides both luxury housing options as well as workforce friendly options.

“I think in downtown Cleveland, as we build more housing, we’re building housing

of all price points. You know, we do have luxury, expensive high rises. We also have workforce-friendly housing that people can access.” Gerlach said.

Gerlach acknowledged the importance of planning for inclusive growth. “I think in a region like Northeast Ohio, in a city like Cleveland, development is a net positive, like no question,” Gerlach said. “I can understand where we need to be mindful about the future and make sure that we continue to grow in a way that is inclusive.”

As Cleveland continues to evolve, development projects will remain a defining factor in the city’s future with the potential to either uplift or displace the communities they touch.

Mary Kate McNamee is a student at Ohio University studying English Literature and History. She writes for the news and human interest section of her school paper and is interning at The Cleveland Observer for the summer.

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Free College Prep Programs Support Low-Income Cleveland Youth



Case Western Reserve University TRIO Students. TRIO--(Upward Bound, Talent Search, Student Support Services) Credit: CWRU



By Amaya Dennis

As college costs rise and enrollment declines, many teenagers feel discouraged from pursuing higher education. That’s where TRIO at Case Western Reserve University steps in. TRIO offers free tutoring and college prep through its Upward Bound and Educational Talent Search programs, designed for low-income, first-generation college students in Greater Cleveland.

About the Director

Erica Calderon, holds a master’s degree in school counseling and a bachelor’s degree in social work. She began her career working with high school students in case management and mental health. She later transitioned to supporting youth struggling with alcohol and substance use. That path eventually led her into education and to TRIO. Calderon joined the TRIO Upward Bound team in 2010 and became director of both the Upward Bound and Educational Talent Search programs in 2018.

Calderon understands her students because she once stood in their shoes. Her goal is to show students that it’s possible to grow from humble beginnings into leadership. “They could get out of that environment and do something more for themselves,” she said, “and come back to inspire the next batch of leaders in their community.” One of those leaders helping to guide younger students is Aaron Street Jr., an alumnus of the TRIO program. Aaron Street Jr. is a rising sophomore at Alabama State University who began his path to greatness with TRIO in the seventh grade. Over the years, he

spent countless hours with the program, from visiting their rooms to grabbing snacks and chatting to visiting college campuses. Although his first year at college was demanding, the guidance he received from TRIO was intensive enough that he felt right at home at his HBCU.

Available Opportunities

TRIO programs are a key factor in breaking down barriers to college access. Each year, more than 600 students receive free personal and academic counseling, including high school assistance, college enrollment guidance, and financial advising. Key components of TRIO are tutoring and test prep during the academic year, and workshops every other Saturday for students to learn skills such as leadership, financial literacy, and soft skills. As many as 70 percent of students involved in TRIO programs pursue some higher education. The only requirements are a minimum 2.5 GPA, proof of low-income and first-generation status and motivation to learn. TRIO offers two ways for students to get involved: academic-year programming and summer or weekend sessions available to various age groups and school districts. Upward Bound: Academic Rigor Meets Real-World Skills Upward Bound is a TRIO program that serves the Cleveland Metropolitan School District and Euclid High School students. Through Upward Bound, students travel to other places, including Puerto Rico, for college visits. Calderon states that if a student is in Upward Bound, “they would have had the opportunity to visit at least four or five colleges per year,” which can total up to 20 colleges before it’s time to start applying. During the summer, Upward Bound has a free six-week program on CWRU’s campus. A typical day consists of core classes, an elective, and lunch. Students break into groups by the grade they’re

going to, and each group has foreign language, language arts, mathematics, and science classes to prepare them for that grade’s curriculum. This summer, the final class of the day will be an elective, like robotics, podcasting, or chess. Upward Bound provides funding for 113 students annually.

For Younger Students

The Educational Talent Search (ETS) project serves up to 500 students annually. To qualify, students must be at least 11 years old and enrolled in grades six through 12 in the East Cleveland or Euclid City School Districts. ETS offers similar services to Upward Bound, helping students navigate academics, plan for college, and develop key skills. An early start with ETS prepares students not only for postsecondary education but also for a smoother transition into high school and college.

Building Toward the Future

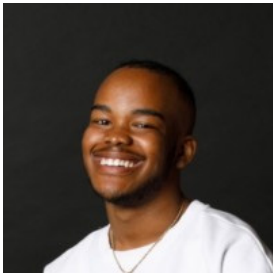
While the impact of TRIO is clear, programs nationwide are fighting to stay afloat. Recent policy changes at the federal level affecting higher education and pre-collegiate programs make public support more critical than ever. “Without programs like these,” Calderon said, “students have a harder time navigating the application process for postsecondary education and understanding what to do.” On the flip side, if the programs continue and receive funding, there are some innovations she’s looking to implement. With the growth of AI, Calderon wants to ensure that her students are AI-ready so they’re not falling behind on the technology curve when they go to college.

Calderon’s Message for Cleveland Youth

As young Cleveland students navigate the transition to high school and beyond, Calderon encourages them to embrace the challenges of preparing for college. She reminds students that TRIO is there to support them every step of the way. Her message: Don’t be afraid to seek your purpose, and keep using your resources—even after you graduate from the program. For more information on pre-collegiate resources or to apply for TRIO programs, visit this link. <https://case.precollegeprograms.org/application> Amaya Dennis is a student at Case Western Reserve University studying Political Science and Anthropology with a Pre-Law focus. She is serving as a summer intern with The Cleveland Observer.



Tyler Perry Hit with \$260 Million Sexual Misconduct Lawsuit



By Konner Hines

Tyler Perry, the billionaire film and television mogul, is facing a \$260 million sexual misconduct lawsuit filed by actor Derek Dixon.

The suit, submitted in Los Angeles Superior Court, alleges Perry sexually assaulted Dixon during production of the BET series The Oval and Ruthless.

What Happened Was.

Dixon, who had roles in both series, claims Perry used his position of power to foster a “coercive, sexually exploitative dynamic” on set. The actor also alleges a broader pattern of abuse within Perry’s production environment.

Perry’s legal team denied the accusations, calling the case a “scam” and accusing Dixon of extortion. “There is no merit to these claims,” a Perry spokesperson stated. “We will vigorously defend against these false allegations.”

Background

The lawsuit has sparked mixed reactions across the entertainment industry and online. While many fans expressed shock, others referenced rumors and internet speculation about Perry’s behavior, some of which date back more than a decade. In particular, a 2010 episode of The Boondocks satirized a character resembling Perry, hinting at questionable behavior toward male actors.

Despite the lawsuit, Perry’s partnership with BET remains intact. The network has not issued a public statement, and production on his various projects appears to be continuing as scheduled.



Tyler Perry, the billionaire film and television mogul, is facing a \$260 million sexual misconduct lawsuit filed by actor Derek Dixon.

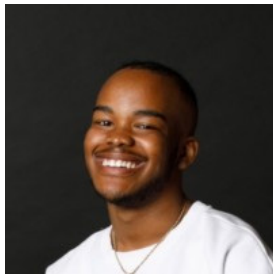
A trial date has not yet been set.

Community Impact

This case raises important conversations around power dynamics in entertainment, particularly within Black Hollywood. As the story unfolds, it may influence how allegations of misconduct are handled in tight-knit creative communities.

Konner Hines is a marketing and international business student at Baldwin Wallace University and a member of the Honors College. Passionate about storytelling and global issues, Hines explores pop culture, media, and social justice through thought-provoking writing.

Beyoncé’s Scary Near-Fall from High-Flying Prop Halts Houston Concert



By Konner Hines

Beyoncé paused her June 28 concert in Houston Cowboy Carter when a suspended stage prop began to tilt while she was performing mid air. The incident occurred during the finale number “16 Carriages”, shocking thousands of fans.

The 43-year-old superstar was seated atop a red convertible platform when it suddenly became unstable. Harnessed and calm, Beyoncé gripped a cable and instructed the crew to stop. “Stop. Stop. Stop. Stop,” she repeated as the music cut out and the vehicle was safely lowered.

What Happened

The malfunction took place during Beyoncé’s final hometown performance. The set piece, designed to elevate her above the crowd, malfunctioned near the song’s end. Once safely back onstage, she thanked the audience saying, “If ever I fall, I know y’all will catch me.”

Fans praised her poise and professionalism in handling the moment. The artist later addressed the scare on Instagram, sharing a humorous video montage with the caption “Sittin’ Sidewayz.”

Tour Background

The Cowboy Carter tour has



Beyoncé, being safely lowered from a defective car prop, during her Houston tour. Credit: YouTube

been known for elaborate visuals and unexpected moments.

Previous stops featured appearances by Jay-Z and Miley Cyrus. Reports now suggest the suspended prop segment has been removed from upcoming shows as a safety precaution.

Community Impact

The incident underscores the risks involved in large-scale productions and the importance of rapid response. The incident serves as a reminder of the risks in live performance.

Like Michael Jackson’s 1984 set accident, it underscores the need for strict safety protocols in complex stage productions.

Daily Reflection saying 3 Questions to Ask Yourself Daily



By Jennifer Bailey, LCSW & RDT

Being able to identify, manage, and express our emotions in healthy ways enables us to navigate life’s highs and lows with confidence.

This is known as emotional intelligence. According to Mental Health America, emotional intelligence is “the ability to manage both your own emotions and understand the emotions of people around you.”

Part of building emotional intelligence means being able to know what emotion you are experiencing and how it presents itself in your physical body. Because this concept is new territory, this article focuses only on understanding our own emotions.

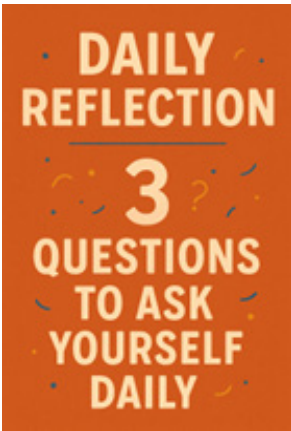
Benefits of Emotional Intelligence

Dr. Debbie L. Stowen, a social worker and veterinarian, wrote an article on the benefits of emotional intelligence. Stowen reports that emotional intelligence helps people manage stress more efficiently, get along better with others, and reach your highest potential.

In order to build our emotional intelligence, we need to practice.

Daily Reflection: Emotional Intelligence Practice

A daily reflection is a simple



and helpful way to check in with yourself to build your emotional intelligence. These moments of pause can help you feel more grounded and in control of yourself. Each day, ask yourself these three questions:

- 1. What am I feeling?** Example: I am feeling anxious about my job interview.
- 2. Where is it showing up in my body?** Example: I feel butterflies in my stomach, and my heart is racing.
- 3. What do I need right now?** Example: I need to take deep breaths and remember I have prepared for the interview.

The goal is to make this a habit. You can write your answers down in a journal or set a reminder on your phone to think about your responses. You could also link this to a habit you already have, like brushing your teeth. Think about your answers to these questions.

How Do these Questions Help

When using these questions, you allow yourself to slow down, to think, and respond, instead of automatically reacting. This helps us advocate for ourselves and reduce emotional outbursts, which can positively impact our relationships, how we parent, and our work life.

Emotional Intelligence in the Black community: Naming What We Feel



By: Jennifer Bailey, LCSW & RDT

Emotional intelligence is “the ability to read our instinctive feelings and those of others, allowing us to understand and label emotions as well as express and regulate them”, as defined by Dr. Marc Brackett, founding director of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence and a professor in the Yale Child Study Center.

Being able to recognize and manage your emotions helps you manage life stressors, relationships, and the unexpected. However, emotional intelligence has been an area where the Black community has struggled.

In times of crisis, recognizing one’s emotions is not the priority; overcoming the threat is. Looking at the history of Black people in America, slavery, Jim Crow, systemic racism, poverty, and police brutality can be experienced as threats.

As a result, emotional intelligence in the Black community remains underdeveloped or overlooked.

To develop emotional intelligence, we must first understand the basics.

Basics of Emotional Intelligence

According to PositivePsychology.com, there are 5 components of emotional intelligence: Self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, social skills, and empathy.

While all five components are important, the main focus of this article will be on the components of self-awareness and self-regulation.

Self-awareness

PositivePsychology.com defines self-awareness as “the capacity to recognize and understand emotions and to have a sense of how one’s actions, moods, and the emotions of others take effect.”

This also means being able to label emotions correctly and understanding how our emotions influence our actions. Self-awareness also includes being open to and learning from new experiences and ideas.

Self-regulation

Self-regulation refers to how you express your emotions, cope with change, manage conflict, handle challenging situations, and understand the impact of your actions on those around you.

Labeling your emotions is the first step to developing emotional

intelligence, label what you are feeling; this is the self-awareness component mentioned earlier. Psychologist Robert Plutchik identified 8 core emotions.

Each emotion is paired with its opposite: fear-anger, joy-sadness, trust-disgust, and surprise-anticipation. Emotional intelligence helps us understand that each emotion serves a purpose, and if a given emotion is denied acknowledgment and expression, there can be negative outcomes. Emotional intelligence has an impact on how we function across environments.

Emotional intelligence across settings

Mental Health America reports that individuals with high

and lack emotional intelligence are the ones who are very moody and have different approaches every day. And in sports, where consistency is so important, that stunts the growth for yourself and teammates.”

In the workplace, High emotional intelligence supports skills in conflict management, communication, and leadership.

According to Mental Health America, “Employees who can self-regulate their emotions are often able to avoid making impulsive decisions – they think objectively before they act.” It can also build resilience in the workplace, helping Black employees navigate code-switching, microaggressions, and burnout.

Harris goes on to say, “Being

The outcomes associated with high emotional intelligence can benefit both our personal and professional lives. This isn’t a new concept, so why should the Black community be trying to incorporate this in daily life now?

Emotional intelligence: Why now?

As the awareness of productive mental health practices increases, the Black community continues to lag.

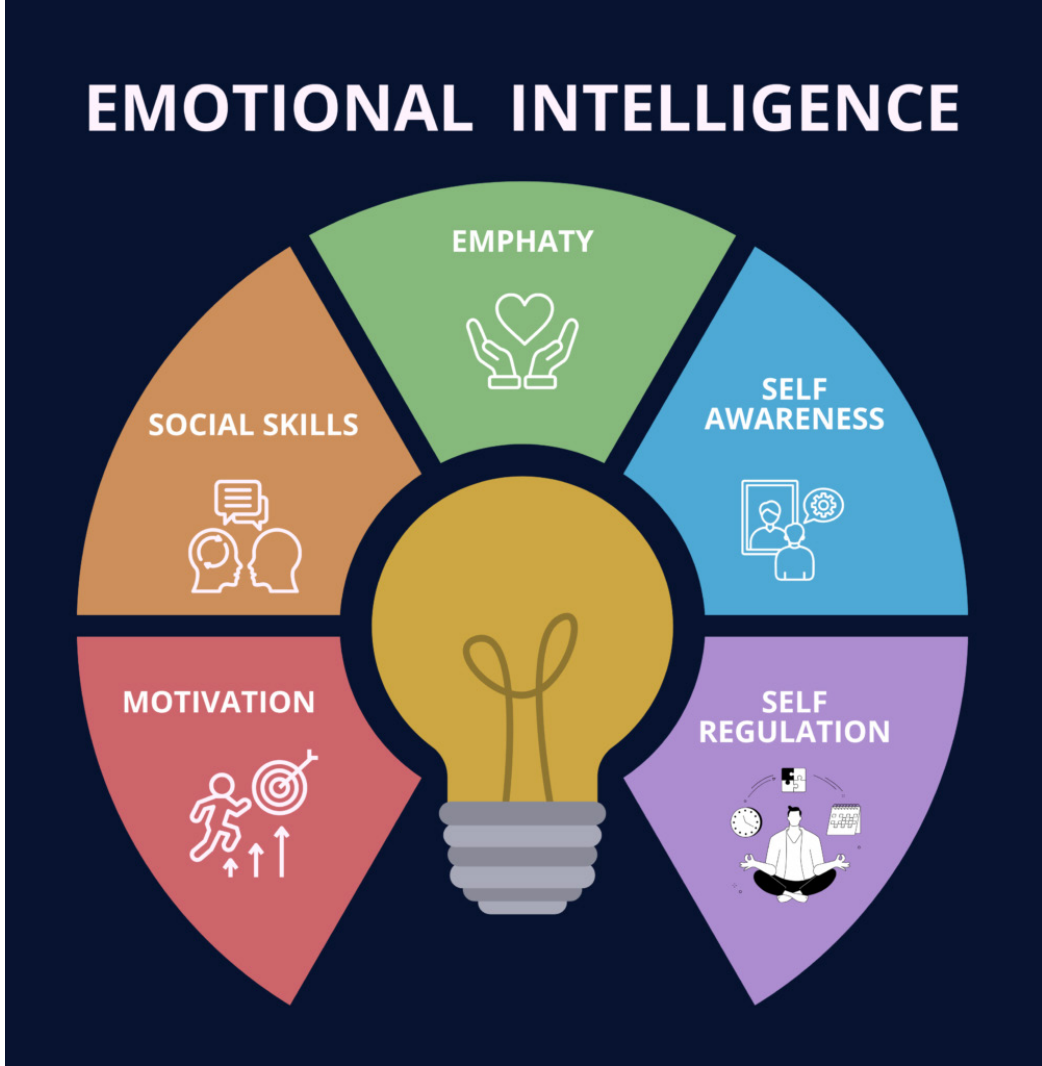
Stigma remains one of the biggest barriers to mental health support. Conversations about our emotions, feelings, and moods are a starting point in breaking down the barrier of stigma.

This also allows us an opportunity to heal from generational trauma, learning more effective ways of navigating the hardships of life while giving us access to experience joy.

Takeaways

- **5 Components of Emotional Intelligence**
 - Self-awareness
 - Self-regulation
 - Social skills
 - Empathy
 - Motivation
- **8 core emotions**
 - Anger
 - Fear
 - Sadness
 - Disgust
 - Surprise
 - Anticipation
 - Joy
 - Trust
- **Benefits of Emotional Intelligence**
 - In the workplace, high emotional intelligence can result in strong skills in conflict management, communication, and leadership.
 - At home, it can allow you to make more thoughtful decisions as a spouse and parent.
 - Why emotional intelligence now?
 - The stigma around accessing mental health support is one of the biggest barriers. Conversations about our emotions, feelings, and moods are a starting point in breaking down the barrier of stigma.

Jennifer Bailey is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) and Registered Drama Therapist (RDT). She is a mother of three.



emotional intelligence “can identify how they are feeling, what those feelings mean, and how those emotions impact their behavior and, in turn, other people.”

Emotional intelligence at home

High emotional intelligence at home allows us to have better and deeper connections with our families. It allows parents to model positive and healthy stress management of how to manage stress and communicate effectively.

High emotional intelligence in the home can allow you to make more thoughtful decisions as a spouse.

Emotional intelligence at work

David Harris, assistant basketball coach at Northern Kentucky University, discusses the role of emotional intelligence in his line of work within the world of basketball.

“The players and coaches who aren’t aware of their emotions

able to control your emotions in the world of sports as either an athlete or coach is huge. Athletes are often driven to win at all costs.

When in reality, you will fail a lot and even at times way more than you succeed. When you don’t win a championship, you ‘fail’. So that means only 1 team can ‘succeed’. Can you handle your emotions after a failure/loss? It’s an everyday cycle that you have to deal with.

The players and coaches that can move on from a bad drill, day, or even season are the ones that see more growth and actual joy in their life.”

STAY INFORMED
Point your phone camera at the QR code to get information about free events, local community, City Council meeting, and free events.
Let your voice be heard.

Trump’s Travel Ban: What You Need to Know



By Amaya Dennis

According to the Associated Press, President Trump issued a proclamation that barred nationals from 19 countries from entering the United States, citing national security and terrorism concerns. Of these countries, 12 received partial entry restrictions, while entry from the other seven was fully suspended. The proclamation went into effect on June 9, but how are civic leaders of Cleveland, the most diverse city in Ohio, responding weeks later?

What Is in the Proclamation?

The proclamation, titled ‘Restricting the Entry of Foreign Nationals to Protect the United States from Foreign Terrorists and Other National Security and Public Safety Threats’, is a follow-up to Trump’s original travel ban from his previous term. The original ban was commonly referred to as the Muslim Ban, because it barred citizens of Muslim-majority countries from entering the U.S.

Trump May Ban Travel to the U.S. From 36 More Countries

Angola	Liberia
Antigua and Barbuda	Malawi
Benin	Mauritania
Bhutan	Niger
Burkina Faso	Nigeria
Cambodia	St. Kitts and Nevis
Cameroon	St. Lucia
Cape Verde	São Tomé and Príncipe
Dem. Republic of Congo	Senegal
Djibouti	South Sudan
Dominica	Syria
Ethiopia	Tanzania
Egypt	Tonga
Gabon	Tuvalu
Gambia	Uganda
Ghana	Vanuatu
Ivory Coast	Zambia
Kyrgyzstan	Zimbabwe

for 90 days. The new proclamation mirrors the earlier ban, with nine of the 19 restricted countries having a Muslim majority population. The premise of the ban is to prevent citizens of certain countries from entering the United States. Cleveland native Benjamin Mullin-Vanneste, a graduate of Campus International High School, is pursuing a degree in International Studies with a focus on the Middle East and North Africa at Case Western Reserve University. He has previously organized

and founded activism groups on campus, and currently organizes with the Party for Socialism and Liberation. Ben noted that many seeking refuge in the U.S. come from countries destabilized by U.S. intervention. “The reason that many people from these countries might be looking to make the United States their home is directly a result of the United States’ intervention in these countries.” The United States interfered with nearly all of these countries at one point, militarily or economically. That may play a role in the stability of the countries and the safety of their citizens. This creates a sort of catch-22, where individuals seek refuge and protection in a country that potentially contributed to some of the issues they hope to escape. **Dangerous Community Effects**

Though the vast majority of Cleveland residents are not immigrants, the ban still impacts Cleveland’s diverse communities, as it is racially and ethnically diverse. All countries affected by this ban are non-white countries, and they are being directly associated with terrorism through the language of the proclamation. *Continue on page 11*

Ohio’s New Budget Bill Protects High Earners While Social Services Suffer



By Angela Hay

On June 30, Governor Mike DeWine signed Ohio’s budget bill for fiscal years 2026 and 2027. According to a press release from the governor’s office, the bill serves as a tool to support children and families, strengthen the workforce, and invest in communities. DeWine says the plan will “make Ohio the best place for everyone to live their version of

the American Dream.” The budget includes a 2.75% flat income tax rate, reducing taxes by 0.75% for those earning more than \$100,000 annually. This could result in a loss of approximately \$1 billion to the General Revenue Fund (GRF), the primary source of funding for Medicaid, K-12 education, and many other social services. Shari O’Brenski, president of the Cleveland Teachers Union, described this as “feeding the rich at the expense of the poor.” “The only ones getting a break are the people who can most afford to pay taxes,” O’Brenski said. “It is a diabolical attempt to con the public into thinking they’re getting

some sort of tax relief when in reality they’re starving K-12 public education. And, honestly, I believe that’s the goal.” O’Brenski noted that House Speaker Matt Huffman has used his career to promote school vouchers, school choice programs, and Catholic education, all of which compete with public school dollars. “(Huffman) would love to just wipe K-12 public education off the map,” O’Brenski said. “That is his passion at the expense of public schools.” The bill also affected public libraries. Library supporters celebrated the governor’s veto of an expensive and time-consuming proposal meant to control the placement within the library of materials on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Supporters continue to express concern about library funding, which is tied to the GRF. Because Ohio libraries currently receive 1.7% of the GRF, the flat tax reduction could result in a loss of \$17 million in library funding. In anticipation of the bill’s passage, Cleveland Mayor Justin M. Bibb spoke against two of the bill’s provisions, both related to a new stadium for the Cleveland Browns. In a public statement, he described being “deeply disappointed” by the

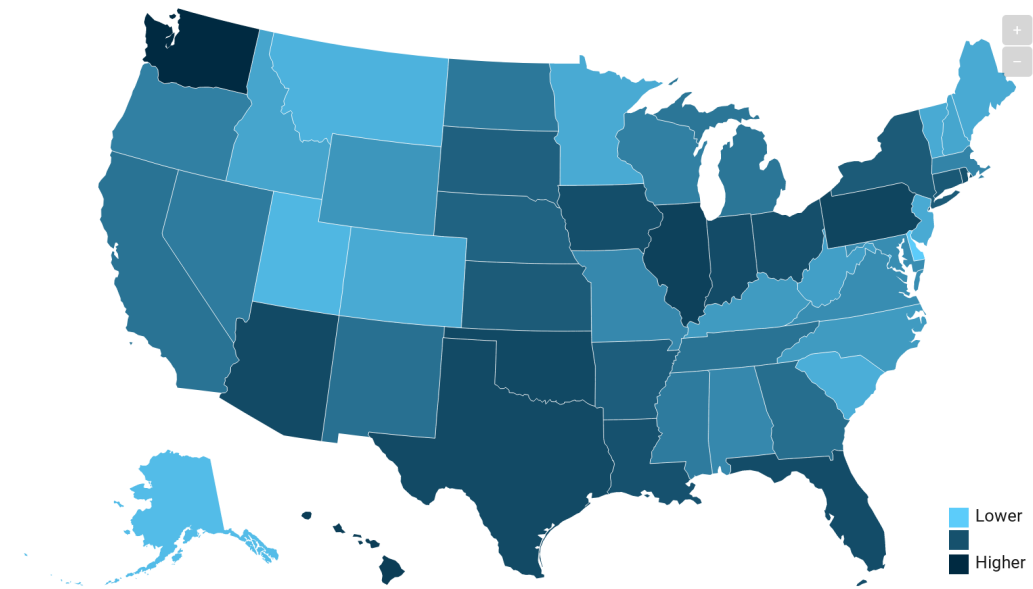
budget’s use of a public subsidy to build a new stadium outside downtown Cleveland. He also disapproved of the budget’s dismantling of the Modell Law, which legislates the relocation of sports teams. Both provisions were approved by the governor in the final budget. Governor DeWine vetoed 67 other parts of the bill, most of which he described as being outside of public interest. “The vast majority of voters have a grasp on what is happening,” O’Brenski said. “Speaker Huffman and his cronies are not as slick as they think they are. And we aren’t as dumb as they think we are. The only hope we have is that the public at large really pushes back against this, and ultimately, they’re going to have to push back at the ballot box.” *Angela Hay is a journalism student at Capital University (Class of 2025) and a Cleveland Observer intern dedicated to highlighting fresh voices and untold stories from Greater Cleveland.*



Ohio Statehouse Columbus. Credit Ohio State House

House Bill 1: Major property tax reform in over 50 years

How High Are State and Local Taxes for Low-Income Families in Your State?



Source: Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy (ITEP), July 2019 - Created with Datawrapper



By: Mary Kate McNamee

House Bill 1 seeks to provide an estimated \$2 billion reduction in Ohio state income tax, according to “House Bill 1 Summary and Analysis,” by the Ohio Education Policy Institute. The bill, sponsored by Representatives Angela King and Roy Klopfenstein, would change how the state calculates property taxes, changing property tax calculations for the first time since 1972.

Property tax rates are changing

According to the summary and analysis by the Ohio Education Policy Institute, House Bill 1 would transform Ohio’s tax system, transitioning from a graduated income tax structure to a flat tax rate of 2.75%. The the bill changes more than just tax rates.

The bill would also eliminate the 10% property tax rollback program” The 10% rollback offers relief to residential and agricultural property, which currently saves taxpayers about \$1.22 billion annually. Currently, the state covers this cost and reimburses local school districts and local governments.

As the Ohio Education Policy Institute reports, of the total rollback amount, \$805 million goes to K-12 school districts and Joint Vocational School Districts.

The remaining \$416 million is split across Ohio’s municipalities and agencies. Eliminating the 10%

rollback would place this financial burden on local taxpayers instead of the state.

How does this affect taxpayers?

As the summary and analysis by the Ohio Education Policy Institute states, the elimination of the rollback would increase property taxes for all homeowners and farmers by the amount of their savings they currently receive from the rollback.

To combat this increase, House Bill 1 includes a provision that reduces the assessment percentage on residential and agricultural property from 35% to 31.5%.

This reduction, however, could leave local schools and governments financially vulnerable. The summary and analysis by the Ohio Education Policy Institute explains that districts without emergency or bond levies could lose 10% of their property tax revenue due to the lower assessment rate. This could impact the amount of services a local school or government can provide.

Currently, House Bill 1 has been introduced to the Ohio House and is still in the process of gaining approval. The bill would revamp the state’s approach to property taxes, posing major implications for Ohio taxpayers.

Mary Kate McNamee is a student at Ohio University studying English Literature and History. Mary Kate writes for the news and human interest section of her school paper, and is interning for The Cleveland Observer for the summer.

Trump’s Travel Ban

From page 10

Ben believes this association is dangerous, for “people from these countries, and also those who look like they’re from these countries, which includes a wide range of individuals”.

With many of these countries sharing ethnic backgrounds, some may find it easy to stereotype and lump those with similar appearances together, but it does more harm to these groups than one might think. Such typecasting also affects those who are not from those ethnic backgrounds, but share the religion, or vice versa.

According to the BBC, “besides Iran, none of the 12 countries hit by the outright ban are named on the US government’s state sponsors of terrorism list.”

That list names Syria, Cuba, North Korea, and Iran as sponsors of terrorism, though Iran is the only one to be subject to this ban.

The other 18 countries have not been identified as terrorists by the United States government, but are defined as such in the proclamation.

This also aligns with Ben’s viewpoint, as he argues that, rather than these countries being sponsors of terrorism, “all [Trump] means is these are people who are

very ideologically different, and challenge American neoliberalism.”

What Can We Do?

With the shift of what countries and people are associated with terrorism by the government, Americans must remain educated and unbigoted when interacting with each other, especially community members from these targeted demographics.

The Washington Post reports that Trump announced the potential addition of 36 more countries to this list, for both partial and full suspension. It is crucial that the community remains up-to-date on future amendments to the proclamation and keeps an eye out for resources that may assist these targeted demographics.

Amaya Dennis is a student at Case Western Reserve University studying Political Science and Anthropology with a Pre-Law focus. She is serving as a summer intern with The Cleveland Observer.



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Mariah Howard Champions Global Growth With Cleveland at the Center



By Ray'Chel Wilson, CFEI, CFT-I



When Mariah T. Howard steps into a room, be it City Hall, a trade summit, or a neighborhood gathering, she carries Cleveland with her. Not just as her hometown, but as a living example of what's possible when local roots meet global ambition. As chief innovation officer for the National Black Chamber of Commerce and a serial entrepreneur, Howard's recent experience at the 14th Annual U.S.-Nigeria Trade & Investment Summit in Cleveland highlighted Cleveland's readiness to lead globally.

Howard, who represented the National Black Chamber of Commerce, clarified she did not represent the city officially.

She highlighted Cleveland's role as host and described it as "strategically positioned to support a global economic transformation," especially for business owners seeking a high quality of life through advanced contracting and manufacturing.

From the Cleveland's Lakefront to Lagos

The summit, hosted by National U.S.- Arab Chamber of Commerce (NUSACC) with Global Cleveland, the Collaborative Chambers Alliance (GCGCA), and the Greater Cleveland Chinese Chamber of Commerce(GCCC), brought together leaders from across the Black and African diaspora.

In his May address, keynote speaker Ambassador Abubakar Jidda, consul general of Nigeria in New York, called U.S.-Africa trade a strategic priority.

Africa is among the world's fastest-growing consumer markets, according to the Brookings Institution. Nigeria, with over 220 million people, is a gateway to West Africa, a hub of culture, energy, and innovation, as noted by Countrymeters and the Premium Times. Yet fewer



Mariah T. Howard chief innovation officer for the National Black Chamber of Commerce

than 1% of U.S. small businesses export, despite making up 99% of all firms, according to the U.S. Small Business Administration.

Cleveland's Strategic Edge

Cleveland's international port generated more than \$7 billion in regional economic impact in 2023, according to a



Cuyahoga River in Cleveland, Ohio Credit Cuyahoga Port Authority

study commissioned by the Ohio Department of Transportation.

"The next step is supporting business owners who can leverage these assets to drive global economic transformation," Howard said. "We are not just talking about contracts and manufacturing. We are talking about building generational wealth, both here and abroad."

One voice standing out was Sam Ifeacho, founder of Discover Chemical and Ifeacho & Associates Digital Solutions.

He is creating a pipeline between U.S. manufacturers and African markets, providing clean fuels, specialty chemicals, and industrial solutions, while helping local suppliers prepare for international contracts.

"He is proof that small businesses can make a global impact. But you have to be willing to step into the room, take a chance on yourself, and own the opportunity," Howard said.

Keys for Cleveland Business Owners

1. Compliance is key

Business structure and compliance can make or break success. "Do your homework, permits, codes, licenses," Howard said. Know your company's unique value in the industry.

2. Collaboration is king

"Recognize and honor the work that is already being done," Howard said. Collaboration runs deep, from community leaders to local chambers of commerce to job-creating initiatives.

3. Know your numbers

Cleveland's population is 362,656, according to the 2023 Census. But the Port of Cleveland contributes \$4.7 billion in annual activity and supports 22,000 jobs. "Know your numbers," Howard said. "If you land a big contract, how many people will you need to hire? Elevate lives, not just your bottom line."

We don't give up. There's always something to do, concerts, development projects like the North Coast Connector, and a lakefront that's about to get even better."

The North Coast Connector is a multi-phase, 2.25-million-square-foot development valued at more than \$1.1 billion.

Asked about her favorite restaurant, Howard laughed. "There are too many to choose from! Downtown, Ohio City, the East Side, every neighborhood has its gems."

Grants as a Gateway

As the city's Program Manager in the Department of Finance and Innovation and Technology, Howard supports strategic efforts aimed at enhancing citywide services and promoting equitable access to economic opportunity.

She highlights a variety of local, state, and federal resources available to small businesses seeking to scale. These include programs such as Make It in Cleveland's Incentives & Financing, city-administered public grants, and services offered by longstanding ecosystem partners like the Urban League of Greater Cleveland and the Cleveland District Office of the U.S. Small Business Administration.

Additional technical assistance providers across the region offer guidance to help businesses pursue federal funding opportunities, improve compliance, and strengthen their capital readiness.

The Takeaway

Cleveland is more than a city; it's a launchpad.

"Do your part where you are, with what you have," Howard said. "That's how you make the world better, and that's how Cleveland leads the way."

Disclaimer

The views expressed in this article are solely those of Mariah T. Howard and do not represent the City of Cleveland. Mention of private entities, including Made Marketing, is for informational purposes only and does not imply affiliation or endorsement by the city.

Ray'Chel Wilson, a Toledo native, is a certified financial educator and therapist, author of the Black Wealth Freedom workbook series, and CEO of ForOurLastNames, a platform helping first-generation wealth builders turn financial trauma into traction.

