Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Date: Sunday, March 09, 2014
Location: PITTSBURGH, PA
Circulation (DMA): 234,806 (22)
Type (Frequency): Newspaper (S)
Page: A9,A10
Section: Main
Keyword: Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh

active, always thinking, always doing," said Elise Yanders, who knows her through the Pittsburgh Conference of the AME Church. "I can't see her slowing down."

Ms. Johnson received heaps of support in the days after the fire. Hundreds of calls inundated her cell phone, jamming her voicemail inbox. Hill District residents filled her new closet with dresses, suits and pajamas.

When Ms. Johnson returned to her home, she found a scene of surreal desolation. Water from fire hoses had broken through the windows, coating the floors and walls with ice mixed with ash and ceiling fragments. Pillars of ice as thick as tree trunks connected the floor and ceiling in her dining room.

On the dining table, her Bible was open to the Book of Psalms, just as she had left it.

It was strangely beautiful, she thought.

A dynamic bond

Ms. Witherspoon shared her sister's ideals of charity and hard work. While Ms. Johnson held big jobs in companies and service organizations, Ms. Witherspoon's efforts had a grass-roots quality. She mentored dozens of young people over the years, often students or migrants from the South. She usually had one or two of them living in her home free of charge.

One of those youngsters was Johnnie Miott, who moved here from South Carolina at age 29. Ms. Witherspoon helped him build a life here, giving him a place to stay and ushering him into the Bethel AME community.

With her mixture of kindness and assertiveness, and her talent as a listener, she was also a source of guidance for him. When Mr. Miott got hot-headed about something, she would cool him down, urging him to resolve it peacefully.

"She was a gentle fighter — a fighter who didn't believe in violence," Mr. Miott said.

For half a century, Ms. Witherspoon cooked Bethel AME's giant Thanksgiving and New Year's dinners. When she was in her 90s and arthritis and leg problems forced her to use a walker, some church members thought she should give up her duties, but Ms. Witherspoon wouldn't hear of it.

Together, the sisters were an institution in the Hill District, where their infectious devotion to religion and community influenced many lives. They were pillars of Bethel AME, tithing 10 percent of their incomes.

"When those ladies are gone, oh boy, there's going to be a void," Ms. Moyo said. "The young people don't give that much money."

The sisters were always close, but their relationship deepened about 20 years ago, after Ms. Johnson invited Ms. Witherspoon to move into the house next door, which she also owned.

As neighbors, they ate most of their meals together and had intimate conversations about family, church and God. They took care of each other when they were sick. Ms. Johnson helped her older sister when arthritis slowed her down, and Ms. Witherspoon nursed her younger sister after her stroke and heart attack.

"You could see the love between them. They didn't even have to say anything," Ms. Moyo said. "They were each other's lives."

On Feb. 4, Ms. Johnson and a handful of friends and family gathered at Allegheny Cemetery for Ms. Witherspoon's burial. Before the casket was lowered, she placed a rose on top and rested her hand on its surface.

"I felt that at that moment, she wasn't in the casket, but that we were together for the last time," Ms. Johnson said.

Normally stoic, she broke down in sobs.

Continuing faith

Three weeks after the fire, Janice Brown drove Ms. Johnson from Gibsonia to Bethel AME so she could attend the Sunday service there, as she had thousands of times before.

The sermon, by Rev. James McLemore, focused on a Gospel story of a sick woman who was healed after touching Jesus as he walked through a crowd. "Thy faith hath made thee whole," Jesus tells the woman in the story.

"She had the faith, and she just had to touch him to be healed. That's the kind of faith we have," Ms. Johnson said. "You have to really believe that God will not forsake you. It's not easy."

Ms. Johnson is still recovering from her sister's death. The other day, she went a long time without thinking about the fire. Then she opened a drawer and saw a ladle similar to one her sister used in her cooking. The painful memories were back.

She still wonders why God allowed the tragedy to happen, but she's found some peace. It's like the Book of Job, she tells herself. God allows bad things to happen to good people.

Janet Moyo has told her she can stay in Gibsonia as long as she'd like. More than 50 years after Ms. Johnson became her role model at Bethel AME, Ms. Moyo is still in awe of her. She marvels at her strength of body and mind, her determination to do things for herself. She admires her faith, the hours she spends praying and reading the Bible.

"I get more joy out of Katie being here than she gets out of me," Ms. Moyo said.

Ms. Johnson wants to move back to the Hill District. With her home is slated for demolition, that will be difficult. She's had offers to stay at other places nearby, but her son, an economist who works in Washington D.C., doesn't think it would be good for her health to be close to the site of the fire.

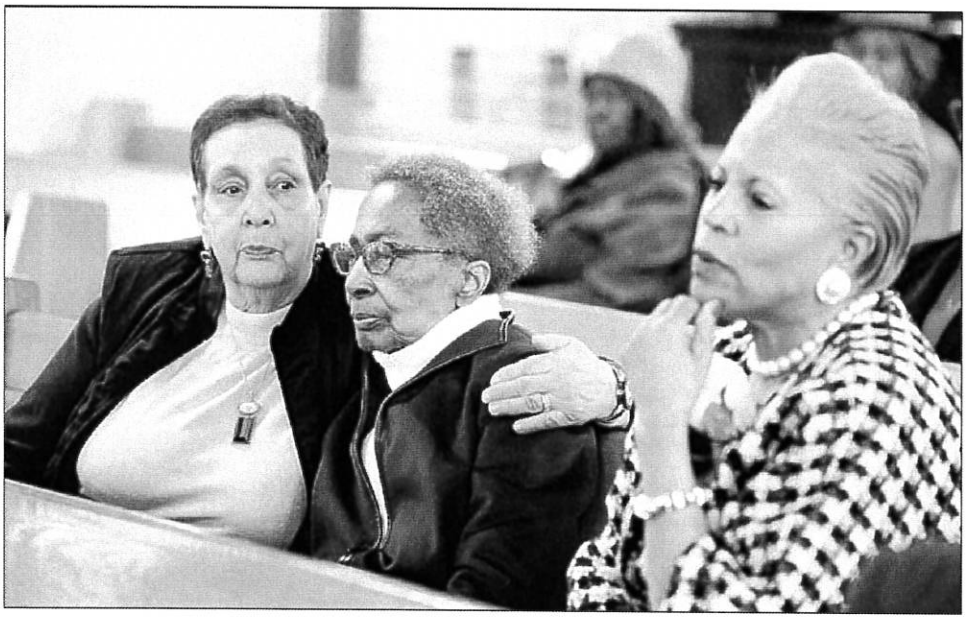
Still, she's determined to move back.

"There's a certain kinship in that area," she said.

Richard Webner: rwebner@post-gazette.com or 412-263-4903.

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Date: Sunday, March 09, 2014
Location: PITTSBURGH, PA
Circulation (DMA): 234,806 (22)
Type (Frequency): Newspaper (S)
Page: A9,A10
Section: Main
Keyword: Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh



Robin Rombach/Post-Gazette

Katie Johnson, center, is comforted by her friends Velma Croom-Green, left, and Janice Brown while attending a service at Bethel AME Church in the Hill District.

Clockwise from far left: Sonia Johnson and her husband Everette Johnson, Katie Johnson and Katie's sister Thelma Witherspoon.

Account: 10811 (1379)
PA-4410
For reprints, please e-mail the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette at pgstore@post-gazette.com

pennsylvania statewide afterschool youth development network

Afterschool Programs
Keep Kids Safe
Inspire Learning
Help Working Families

News

Rising STARS Tuition Assistance Program Support School-Age Child Care Sites

Staff members that work at facilities that serve school-age children only and are open a limited number of hours before and after school will be eligible for the Rising STARS Tuition Assistance Program if they work **15 hours per week rather than 20**. Staff members that are employed at facilities that are open longer hours, but who work exclusively with school-age children, will also be eligible if they work **15 hours per week rather than 20**. Eligible degrees/programs for school-age child care staff will include Elementary Education, PreK-4; Elementary Education, 4-8; Recreation; Human Development and Family Studies (HDFS) with a focus on elementary age children; and Youth Development Certificate delivered by an accredited Institution of Higher Education, as well as the Pennsylvania School-Age Child Care Certificate.

2014 Afterschool Champions Nominations

Deadline: Friday, January 24, 2014

PSAYDN is seeking nominations for Afterschool

PSAYDN Events

January 21, 2014
10 a.m. – 12 p.m.; Webinar
Pennsylvania Quality Assurance System (PQAS) Certification Part II

PQAS maintains a registry of approved Professional Development Instructors (PDIs) to help ensure that professional development activities meet quality standards. This session, presented by PA Key staff, will help you navigate the PQAS application process. Register

Save the Dates

March 11, 2014
State Capitol, Harrisburg, Pa.
PSAYDN Advocacy Day

March 12, 2013
Hilton Harrisburg, Harrisburg Pa.
PSAYDN Annual Meeting

March 13, 2013
Hilton Harrisburg, Harrisburg Pa.
PSAYDN Quality Forum

Champions. These individuals should demonstrate outstanding work in developing, supporting and promoting meaningful high-quality afterschool/out-of-school time programs to benefit children, youth and families across Pennsylvania. The Afterschool Champion Award winners will be recognized during the PSAYDN Annual Meeting on March 12, 2014. Nomination

Announcing PSAYDN's Afterschool Ambassador Class of 2014

First row left to right: Kelli Thompson, PA Partnerships for Children; Jennifer Engel, Sarah Heinz House; Rebecca Altman, Merion Before and After-School; Lori Rue, Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh. *Second row left to right:* Anita Mitchell, Easton Area Community Center; Tammi McMillan, PAEYC and Hosanna House; Thomas McCarty, Spring Valley YMCA; Kacy Conley, PSAYDN Director; Carol Pinder, Philadelphia Freedom Valley YMCA. *Not pictured:* Wendy Etheridge-Smith, Higher Achievement; Jim McPartlin, Neshaminy Kids Club; Salvatore Sandone, Zhang Sah; Anthony Singleton, Educator 4 Education.

The Afterschool Ambassador Class of 2014 will help build afterschool and out of school time advocacy efforts across the Commonwealth. Early December they received training to hone their advocacy skills to help Pennsylvania policymakers consider the impact on afterschool when budget bills and other public policy proposals come before them.

STEM News

Missing From Science Class

Other Events

February 28 — March 3, 2014
New York City, N.Y.
2014 NAA Annual Convention
Join hundreds of afterschool professionals for the largest gathering for learning and connecting in the afterschool field. Register

April 9-11, 2014
Kansa City, Mo.
Midwest Afterschool Science Academy 5.0
This event is a hands-on, in-depth, experiential-based learning opportunity that is focused on youth development, leadership training, project-based learning, and the incorporation of afterschool time with the academic school day to create a seamless learning environment for youth. More

Community Leaders Ask Neighbors to Support Teacher Performance Standards

Pittsburgh Urban Media

If a student in the Pittsburgh Public Schools earns a score of 50 percent on an exam, the student fails.
If a teacher in the same school district receives the same percentage on an evaluation, it is considered passing under a system of evaluations agreed to by the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers and Superintendent Linda Lane.

The evaluation process was considered an important step in increasing the quality of teachers in city classrooms, with the provision that teachers did well would be rewarded, and those who scored unsatisfactorily would be given support and opportunity to improve.

PFT leaders have begun a campaign, however, to lower the evaluation standards, saying that the 48 percent positive required for a teacher to avoid retraining is too high, particularly in light of more lax requirements being rolled out by the Commonwealth.

The teachers with the lowest scores also have a tendency to be placed in schools which are already struggling, in particular, those in lower income African-American neighborhoods already fighting hard to close the racial achievement gap.

Monday morning, African-American leaders and clergy joined PPS parents to ask the Pittsburgh Board of Education to support the enforcement of the performance ranges for distinguished, proficient, basic or unsatisfactory teacher performance. While Lane reports that 85 percent of teachers are ranked as proficient or better, the remaining 15 percent earned less than 150 of a possible 300 points. Nine percent have been ranked as "failing."

Since a 1992 lawsuit to ensure equity in PPS schools, says Wanda Henderson of Advocates for African American Students in the Pittsburgh Public Schools, progress has been made, but "We know that the outcomes for our students aren't good enough."

With a graduation rate of 63 percent for African-American students overall, and only 44 percent for black males, as well as 30 percent less black students performing at grade level or above, "we were hopeful that the work to help teachers improve would lead to something better for our students," Henderson says.
In a letter to the Board of Education, signed by Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh President and CEO Esther Bush, Hill District Education Council Co-Chair Sala Udin, NAACP Pittsburgh Education Committee Chair Dr. Marilyn Barnett Waters,
Black Political Empowerment Project Chair Tim Stevens, A+ Schools Director Carey Harris and Henderson, the coalition says that despite being one of the most high-spending districts in the state, PPS does not get strong outcomes, especially for black children. The district faces financial insolvency in 2016 without further changes, and is in danger of losing $15 million remaining from a $40 million grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to develop criteria as a national model for placing an effective teacher in every classroom.

The evaluation system has been in place for the last four years, and until recently was supported by both teachers and union officials, Black Political Empowerment Project Chair Tim Stevens says.
"We had a chance to become a national model for the United States of America," Stevens says. "Let's not destroy what was begun four years ago."

Stevens, who is also a parent of a student in the PPS schools, says he was proud of the collective efforts between the PFT, the former Superintendent Mark Roosevelt and with Lane, administrators and teachers to establish the evaluation standards.

they be told they need support, and that the school system says 'here it is.'"

"Even [the parents of] children in high-performing schools want every teacher to be as effective as they can be. You can't have a system where we say, 'You're okay,'" Stevens says. "We want a system where the teacher himself or herself knows that they are in the upper echelon of what they are doing: They are a great teacher, and they are credited with being a great teacher."

"We want teachers to at least be 'proficient,'" Stevens says. "And where they are not proficient, it is only logical that "Let's be honest: In any profession, there are those who should not be in that profession. There are some people who need to move on," Stevens says. "So if there are teachers who are not teaching, they need to move on."
"Teaching is too important of a job to not have high standards," Stevens says.

Another PPS parent, Dwayne Barker, says he is not anti-teacher, nor anti-teacher union, "but I am anti-failure." Calling himself a voice for parents who stand up for their children, Barker says that "effective teaching matters for my [two] children, and the families of Pittsburgh."

Barker is also a graduate of PPS schools, and says that along with his parents, some of his teachers were vital to his academic success.

"Those are the teachers who put in the extra time and energy to tell all their students they can be something, that they can make it," Barker says. "The students now within the Pittsburgh Public Schools know which teachers care about them and which ones don't.

Barker says a study shows that in classrooms with effective teachers students learn twice as much.
"The good news is that effective teachers are in every one of our schools in the district," Barker says, "That means we know that some of our teachers have the talent to close the racial achievement gap. The bad news is that failing teachers are more likely to teach in our more high-risk schools, where the majority of students are African –American. Those are the schools our children are most likely to attend."

The coalition says that choices made over time are responsible for continuing inequities in schools, and must be changed to provide each student with the means for success in the workforce or in higher education.

A study released last year shows that one year of "great teaching" has an impact which can increase a child's chances of attending college, having increased lifetime earnings and avoid teen pregnancies.

Reverend Glenn Grayson, Pastor of Wesley Center AME Zion Church, and "most importantly, the father of three children who graduated from Schenley High School," says "behind every catch phrase is a young person whose future will be lost if something is not done immediately to change his or her reality."

"When it comes to young African-American males, the numbers are staggering and the reality is sobering," Grayson says. "Young black males across the board score below their counterparts across the board when it comes to graduation rates, literacy rates, and college preparedness. Many African-American men in turn are locked out of employment, and are filling up the nation's prisons in disproportionate numbers."

"Every student who does not complete high school costs our society an estimate of $260,000 in lost earnings, taxes and productivity," Grayson says. "Our children must be taught at school, at after school programs, at church, at home, and even during play."
"Teaching is a calling, but for those who are called to serve our children, we must hold in our hearts a high expectation. Just as we expect the most from our sports teams, we must also expect the most from our teachers," says Grayson. "The consequences of the soft bigotry of low expectations are just too great for us. When we see gaps in achievement, we know we must do better. There's some catching up we must do."
"Pittsburgh can do better," Grayson says. "There are teachers in every building, no matter what neighborhood our

"I am calling on this 'Most Livable City' of Pittsburgh to care about the future of our city, our public schools, and most importantly, our children. Stand with us," Grayson says.

"We invite the greater Pittsburgh community to reach out and stand with us," Bush says. "We believe when Linda Lane says she knows that the teachers can reach the bar. She is not worried about 'if' the teachers can reach the bar."

Bush says Lane has said, in writing, that the district is interested in, and "will help [teachers] to reach the bar, and we as a community must demand this of our teachers."

"As goes our educational system, so goes our city," Bush says. "All of us are in this together. We must do what we have to do with courage, because we are correct."

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Date: Thursday, March 13, 2014
Location: PITTSBURGH, PA
Circulation (DMA): 153,078 (22)
Type (Frequency): Newspaper (D)
Page: 2
Section: North
Keyword: Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh

LAWRENCE WALSH

Hungry for consumer information?

County program brings in local, state and nonprofit agencies to answer questions

Consumers who visited the City-County Building last week found a buffet of valuable information on the first floor of the nine-story landmark.

A four-hour Consumer Fair, one of five statewide events hosted by Pennsylvania Attorney General Kathleen G. Kane, was a hello-how-are-you meet and greet affair.

It was designed to answer the public's questions and offer brochures and booklets to make them better informed consumers.

Tables were set up on both sides of the floor to make it easy for consumers to see what information each one offered. The fair was held in conjunction with National Consumer Protection Week.

Local, state, federal and nonprofit organizations were represented.

In addition to employees from the local office of the state Bureau of Consumer Protection, there were tables staffed by:

AARP, Allegheny County's Department of Human Services Area Agency on Aging and the treasurer's office, the Better Business Bureau, the state Department of Banking and Securities, Public Utility Commission, Social Security Administration, U.S. Postal Service and the Urban League of Pittsburgh.

Ms. Kane said in a statement that she has made "consumer education, engagement and outreach in Pennsylvania a priority."

She said the consumer protection bureau offers a variety of assistance to thousands of Pennsylvanians every year.

Among other things, it accepts and mediates consumer complaints, promotes consumer safety regarding finances, privacy, technology and other issues and advocates on behalf of consumer rights and protections.

She noted consumer protection has been a major issue in the news.

"Data breaches at major retailers, health providers and web sites have threatened the personal and financial security of millions of Pennsylvanians," she said.

Ms. Kane urged consumers to file complaints if they were hit with "alarming spikes" in their electric bills.

Sky-high electric bills weren't the only things on the minds of consumers who stopped at the bureau's table, said Darlene Westfall, consumer protection agent supervisor.

"They complained about home improvement hassles, used cars that broke down soon after they were purchased, spam calls, debt collection calls for debts they didn't owe or had paid years ago."

The latter are particularly onerous, Ms Westfall said, because the callers sometimes threaten to have the individuals arrested.

"There are no debtors' prisons anymore," she said.

She advised consumers to get the callers' names and phone numbers, if possible, and call the bureau at 1-800-441-2555.

The same goes for telemarketing calls, human and automated.

If consumers have signed up for the Do Not Call List, they should, whenever possible, write down the caller's phone number and name, if he or she will provide it, and then contact the bureau.

The attorney general's office has toll-free numbers for its Health Care Section (1-877-888-4877), Education & Outreach (1-800-525-7642), Child Predator Unit (1-800-385-1044) and Elder Abuse Unit (1-866-623-2137).

It also maintains a Consumer Helpline (1-888-520-6680) and a Contractor Helpline (1-717-772-2425).

To sign up for the Do Not Call List (1-888-777-3406).

I'll have more Consumer Fair information from the Better Business Bureau, Public Utility Commission and the U.S. Postal Service next time.

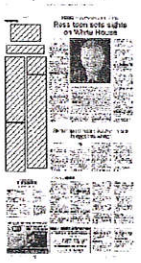
Bug-free box spring

Shawna Williams of the North Side has a bug-free box spring, thanks to the efforts of Dan Shaw, customer service manager of Home Decor Liquidators based in Johns Creek, Ga.

The first plastic-wrapped box spring delivered to Ms. Williams apartment on Valentine's Day contained two stink bugs, one of which was still alive.

It had been sent to her from the company's store in the Strip District and the local store initially had refused to replace it.

Lawrence Walsh can be reached at pyp@post-gazette.com and 412-263-1488. Please include your day, evening and cell phone numbers. Due to volume, he cannot respond to every email or phone call.



IRS/Just Harvest VITA Tax Assistance Returns to Hope Center

TAXES DONE FOR FREE

The collaboration between the IRS, the United Way and Just Harvest, has made it possible for the Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh (HACP) to once again serve as a VITA Tax site for the 2014 tax season.

The VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) program is possible because of volunteers who offer free tax preparation to low and moderate-income taxpayers, the elderly, and those with disabilities. All volunteers are trained in an Internal Revenue Service course in tax law and then tested for a specific certification level. Each year, every preparer must complete and pass the IRS test to become certified.

The HACP tax assistance site opened on Wednesday, January 22, 2014, and will remain in operation until Saturday, April 12, 2014. The program is housed in the Bedford Hope Center, 2305 Bedford Ave., Pittsburgh. Tax preparation days will be Wednesday evenings from 5:00 until 8:00 p.m. and Saturdays from 9:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. During its first month of operation in 2014, the site has provided assistance to 85 families; processing a total of $216,000 in 2014 tax returns.

VITA's goal is to assist citizens who cannot afford to pay for tax preparation assistance. The program's target population is families making $55,000 or less, or individuals making $35,000 or less per year. If you have suffered a job loss or other financial hardship, the program is flexible and may be able to accommodate you. VITA sites can prepare most basic federal and state returns utilizing the 1040 and 1040EZ forms, and related schedules, such as A, B, and C-EZ.

In 2013, the Bedford Hope Center VITA volunteers assisted with the filing of 282 federal returns an increase of 147 percent from 2012. Those filings resulted in refunds totaling $519,173 – up by 152 percent. Just Harvest is making a special effort to educate and assist residents in filing the forms necessary to receive the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).

The EITC is worth up to $5,500 and can boost a family's income by up to 35 percent and families claimed $259,228 in EITC refunds last year. However, almost 25 percent of eligible low to moderate income working families miss out on thousands of dollars in tax refunds because they are unaware of the EITC credit.

HACP wants to help put this money back into the pockets of their residents through VITA which emphasizes making sure that all eligible residents take advantage of this important tax credit. Other tax credits that are available are the Child Tax Credit and Education Credit. *(See the IRS website at www.irs.gov for more information.)*

Before you make your appointment, have your W-2 forms from your employer. To set up an appointment for your tax preparation, call 211 or 1-888-553-5778.

Stephanie Bennett, Bedford Hope Center VITA Tax Site Coordinator (right), assists LaRay Moton with her 2014 tax return.

URBAN LEAGUE OF GREATER PITTSBURGH BRINGS VARIETY OF PROGRAMS AND SERVICES TO HACP COMMUNITIES

Last fiscal year, the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh served over 20,000 individuals in education, health advocacy, housing, early childhood and youth development, hunger services, employment, career training, counseling, and economic empowerment.

The Employment Department provides job skills training, career options, and job placement for people at varying professionals levels, from unemployed to successful business-person, entrepreneur and mature worker.

The Family Growth and Child Development Department promotes positive outcomes for children and youth by strengthening, supporting, and empowering families and communities. Family support centers in Duquesne, Northview Heights and East Hills serve families with children ages 0-5, offering child development and parenting education, goal planning and attainment, referrals, social activities and parent leadership development. The centers host emergency food pantries and have computers available for community use.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

Important Safety Guidelines Specifically for Home Oxygen Tanks

Oxygen guidelines may seem to be both logical and simple; however, as a caregiver or a patient who uses a home oxygen tank, it is imperative to always be cautious and follow the recommended guidelines for safe use.

From the most complex aspects to the simplest details, mistakes can happen virtually anytime, and domestic accidents are common. Do not let your oxygen equipment become the cause of a preventable catastrophe.

HACP residents or caretakers who use any kind of at-home medical oxygen equipment are asked to review and comply with the following safety guidelines:

1 Be sure to use some kind of oxygen concentrator. An oxygen concentrator will never have to be refilled. They are convenient and readily available.

2 If you have liquid oxygen tanks,make sure you know exactly what to do to refill the tanks.

3 Liquid oxygen is also very portable. Most importantly though, if you use portable liquid oxygen in small tanks you must have a large oxygen tank available at home.

4 If you have a large (as well as small) liquid oxygen tank, always be sure that your large liquid oxygen tank is full enough and have a back-up plan for oxygen delivery in case of an emergency.

5 If damage occurs, contact your oxygen supplier the moment you notice any damage to your oxygen equipment.

6 Always have a portable oxygen delivery system (most likely a tank) prepared or filled in case you have to go somewhere quickly.

7 Never smoke, have sources of high temperatures, or fire of any kind near or around your oxygen equipment. Even if you do not know of any reason why you should need to – it is still highly recommended that you put up hazard signs such as 'no smoking' signs wherever your oxygen is stored.

HACP residents who use an oxygen tank should post this caution sticker on the outside of their front door and/or window. Contact your site manager if you need the sticker.

8 Have telephone numbers handy. Keep manufacturer hotlines at home as well as away from home for 24 hour emergency assistance with your medical equipment.

In addition to the information provided here, follow all doctors' and manufacturers' instructions for oxygen tanks and equipment at all times.

URBAN LEAGUE FROM PAGE 6

The Housing Department provides mortgage foreclosure counseling and mediation services between tenants, landlords and other creditors, assists families in finding affordable, quality housing, and helps first time home buyers through the mortgage and purchasing process.

The Hunger Services program offers three programs to promote good nutrition, save on costs and help strengthen family food security:

- Emergency Food Assistance (EFA) helps provide eligible families food when the need is greatest.
- Food for Early Development (FED) helps eligible families not receiving WIC benefits. FED offers baby formula, soft foods, diapers, bottles, and wipes.
- SNAP (food stamps) the Supplemental Assistance Nutrition Program (SNAP), is known as "America's best defense against hunger."
- To enroll, or request more information about SNAP, EFA, and/or FED, call 1-866-395-3663.

The Education and Youth Development Department teaches young people about educational options and develops the leadership skills they need to be successful in school and beyond. This department is responsible for hundreds of youth completing secondary school and moving on to professional training schools, two-year and four-year colleges and other areas of special training.

MAKE YOUR MONEY COUNT WITH BANK ON GREATER PITTSBURGH!

The average unbanked (a person with no checking or savings account) in Pennsylvania will pay approximately $800 a year and over $40,000 over a working lifetime in check cashing fees and money orders. Bank On Greater Pittsburgh partners are committed to helping you and your family take the first step toward financial security.

For more details, visit the Bank On website at www.bankongreaterpittsburgh.org.

Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh, 610 Wood Street, Pittsburgh 15222, 412-227-4802, www.ulpgh.org

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Date: Saturday, March 15, 2014
Location: PITTSBURGH, PA
Circulation (DMA): 153,078 (22)
Type (Frequency): Newspaper (D)
Page: 9
Section: Main
Keyword: Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh

Girls mentor program names local director

Strong Women, Strong Girls, a national mentoring program for pre-adolescent girls with an office in Pittsburgh, has named Sabrina Saunders as its local executive director.

Ms. Saunders, former director of education and youth development for the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh, has worked in the government and nonprofit sectors for the past decade.

At the Urban League, she oversaw seven programs and advocacy projects, including two initiatives impacting the lives of more than 160 at-risk youth per year.

Before that, she was youth policy manager for Mayor Luke Ravenstahl's office and helped establish the Graduate Pittsburgh Summit to combat the high school dropout rate.

Account: 10811 (1381)
PA-441
For reprints, please e-mail the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette at pgstore@post-gazette.com

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Date: Sunday, March 16, 2014
Location: PITTSBURGH, PA
Circulation (DMA): 234,806 (22)
Type (Frequency): Newspaper (S)
Page: S1,S2
Section: Sunday Extra
Keyword: Esther L. Bush

Effort aims to teach benefits of bank accounts

Seeks to discourage costly practices

By Kaitlynn Riely
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

When she was growing up, Esther Bush said, the financial advice she got time and time again was to save her money and to buy a house.

Also good advice: open a bank account.

The Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh — with the support of United Way of Allegheny County, Pittsburgh Mayor Bill Peduto, Allegheny County Executive Rich Fitzgerald, financial institutions and local community groups — recently launched a program to encourage people to sign up for low- or no-cost bank accounts.

The goal of "Bank On Greater Pittsburgh" is to discourage people from using resources such as payday loans and check-cashing businesses, which can often charge heavy fees, and instead use a bank account for paying bills and saving money.

In other words, said Ms. Bush, president and CEO of the Urban League, take the money you would have spent on a payday loan and add it to your grocery bill, or put it toward a car payment.

"There is a lot of common sense in this," she said, adding that talking about financial literacy is part of getting people to plan their finances, rather than live paycheck to paycheck.

"We want to help them to develop these habits," she said.

In Pittsburgh and Allegheny County, it seems, it's a message that could be particularly useful.

Bank On, a program that has been applied in many other U.S. cities, including San Francisco, keeps data on its website about the percentage of households that are "unbanked," meaning without checking or savings accounts, and that are "underbanked," meaning that the household has an account but still uses other services such

SEE **ACCOUNTS,** PAGE 2

as rent-to-own agreements and payday lending.

According to data on the Bank On website, which cites research statistics from the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, 7.7 percent of households nationwide are unbanked and 17.9 percent are underbanked.

In Pittsburgh, the percentages are higher.

Ten percent of households in the city are considered unbanked, and just under 20 percent are underbanked.

In Allegheny County, 5.9 percent of households are unbanked and 17.4 percent are underbanked.

Not having a bank account can get expensive.

The Bank On website, citing data from the Brookings Institution, said paying the extra fees that come with not having a bank account — such as buying money orders or paying for check-cashing services — can amount to $40,000 over a lifetime.

But while opening a bank account might seem an obvious step to take, not everyone does.

Angela Reynolds is director of programs for financially struggling adults and families at United Way of Allegheny County, which is funding the Bank On program with a $150,000 grant for three years. She said some people might live in neighborhoods where there's no traditional bank but there is a check-cashing place.

Others might have grown up with the idea of keeping their money stored in the home.

Debra Squires, director of the family growth and child development department at the Urban League, said some people feel they do not make enough money to open a checking account, while others do not have the money to pay fees or meet the minimum balance.

Still others have had a bad banking experience in the past and feel they might no longer be eligible to open an account.

"Those are just some myths," Ms. Squires said.

The Urban League's program seeks to dispel many of those myths, by partnering with nine banks and federal credit unions, including PNC, Citizens and Dollar, which offer free or low-cost checking accounts.

Huntington Bank, one of the partners, has already signed up seven new customers who were previously unbanked or underbanked, introducing them to an account that has no minimum balance, no fees and a 24-hour grace period for overdraft fees, said Susan Baker Shipley, president of the bank's Western Pennsylvania and Ohio region, who added that another benefit from banking is that once a person has an account, he or she has created a relationship with a bank that can allow them to access further services.

By the end of the year, Ms. Squires said her goal is to have 1,000 people who were previously without a bank account or dependent on other, less reputable sources signed up.

"I am expecting that it will be much higher than that," she said.

Community groups, such as Just Harvest, are helping to spread the word about the Bank On program.

For Just Harvest, it's a good time of year to be talking about opening an account, because the organization already has a program helping people complete their taxes, often finding that clients have no account into which they can place their refund checks, said Rochelle Jackson, its public policy advocate.

The bank account program

Account: 10811 (1382)
PA-4410
For reprints, please e-mail the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette at pgstore@post-gazette.com

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Date: Sunday, March 16, 2014
Location: PITTSBURGH, PA
Circulation (DMA): 234,806 (22)
Type (Frequency): Newspaper (S)
Page: S1,S2
Section: Sunday Extra
Keyword: Esther L. Bush

will be coming up in conversation this tax season, she said.

"We're reaching out to them, to say, 'Hey, here's a better option for you and your family.'"

The Urban League won't consider its work done once a person opens a bank account, Ms. Squires said.

Just as Ms. Bush was encouraged to save and to buy a home, the next step is building the financial literacy of new bank account holders, and encouraging them to save and spend responsibly.

"We want ultimately to help families begin the asset-building process," Ms. Squires said.

More information is available at www.bankongreaterpittsburgh.com or by calling 412-227-4191.

Kaitlynn Riely: kriely@post-gazette.com or 412-263-1707.

Account: 10811 (1382)
PA-4410
For reprints, please e-mail the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette at pgstore@post-gazette.com

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Date: Monday, March 17, 2014
Location: PITTSBURGH, PA
Circulation (DMA): 153,078 (22)
Type (Frequency): Newspaper (D)
Page: 1,2
Section: Local
Keyword: Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh

Convictions in Amish beard case challenged

Civil rights groups want to uphold hate crimes law

By Torsten Ove
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

A coalition of civil rights, religious and ethnic groups is urging a federal court to uphold the constitutionality of the 2009 federal hate crimes law in the case of convicted Amish bishop Sam Mullet and colleagues in Ohio.

The Anti-Defamation League earlier this month filed a friend-of-the-court brief with the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals on behalf of 40 organizations in support of the Hate Crimes Prevention Act.

The Justice Department used that law to convict Mullet and 15 followers of chopping the beards and hair of fellow Amish in a series of 2011 attacks meant to humiliate them for straying from the faith.

Mullet and his followers, all but one related to him, are challenging their convictions and sentences on several fronts.

One of them is that the hate crimes law violates the First Amendment because opponents say it essentially criminalizes thought, long a concern of some civil libertarian groups as well as conservative organizations.

At best, defense attorneys in the Mullet case have argued, the beard-cuttings were assaults to be handled by the local courts, not the federal system.

A second argument is that the law cannot apply to a case in which attackers and victims are of the same faith.

The amicus brief filed March 6 is asking the court to affirm that the law applies in all cases

SEE **CRIME,** PAGE B-2

where religious intolerance is the motivating factor.

The Anti-Defamation League was joined by the NAACP, American Federation of Teachers, the Urban League, the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives and many others.

David Raim, attorney for the coalition, wrote that the law does not infringe on the First Amendment because free speech is not the issue.

Mullet and his followers are free to worship as they wish, he said, but no one is allowed to assault anyone else based on religion.

The hate crimes law also clearly applies to disputes within the same religion, he said.

"[The law] does not and cannot be read to create an exception for crimes committed against people who may share the same faith as the perpetrator," he wrote.

Allowing such an exception, he said, would mean many "bias crimes" would never be prosecuted. In 2012, there were 7,164 hate crimes reported to the FBI. Of those, 19 percent involved victims targeted because of religious beliefs.

Bias crimes, Mr. Raim said, are essentially "identity crimes" intended to intimidate.

He noted that the judge in the Mullet case, U.S. District Judge Dan Aaron Polster, had made the same observation.

"While hate crimes are often committed by members of one religious [or racial or ethnic] group against another, history is replete with examples of internecine violence," the judge said in ruling in 2012 that the indictment of Mullet did not violate the Constitution. "By the defendants' logic, a violent assault by a Catholic on a Protestant, or a Sunni Muslim on a Shiite Muslim, or an Orthodox Jew on a non-Orthodox Jew, would not be prohibited by this statute."

Mr. Raim said the hate crimes law doesn't require hatred of a particular religion but rather that someone was targeted because of religion.

In imposing a 15-year prison term on Mullet, Judge Polster said that was precisely what he did.

"You tried to ram your religious beliefs down the throats of your victims," he said.

At trial, the FBI and numerous witnesses said Mullet had total control over his community, including disciplining its members by putting them in chicken coops and having sex with other men's wives to "counsel" them in marital relations.

Torsten Ove: tove@post-gazette.com or 412-263-1510.

Account: 10811 (1384)
PA-441
For reprints, please e-mail the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette at pgstore@post-gazette.com

Tribune-Review

Date: Monday, March 17, 2014
Location: GREENSBURG, PA
Circulation (DMA): 104,962 (22)
Type (Frequency): Newspaper (D)
Page: 1,4
Section: Main
Keyword: Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh

Charter schools in tense unions

Approval up to districts that would be pinched financially by facilities

BY **MEGAN HARRIS**

Pennsylvania's process for approving charter schools pits would-be school reformers against traditional school districts eager to protect their money and enrollments — a situation that isn't likely to change soon, advocates on both sides say.

State law directs districts to approve charter schools to which they must give up millions in per-pupil state funding. Educators and legislators agree the process is contentious and offers no incentive for budget-pinched districts to feed their competition.

"The intent of the charter school law really was to provide educational opportunities for students that did not exist in our traditional public schools ... to look for ways to do things better and save money," said Linda Hippert, executive director of the Allegheny Intermediate Unit, which represents 42 districts. "We seem to have lost sight of those goals."

Jon Cetel, executive director of Philadelphia-based PennCAN, an education advocacy group, likened the approval process to an arranged marriage.

"It gives birth to a hostile relationship right off the bat," he said.

Charters get state money for students from districts in which they live. For more than a decade since charters were established in 1997, schools received state reimbursements worth about 30 percent of that lost funding. Gov. Tom Corbett cut reimbursements in 2011.

Auditor General Eugene DePasquale, who hosted meetings statewide about charter changes this month, attributed much of the angst to those cuts.

Pennsylvania has 176 charter schools with more than 100,000 students, up 8 percent from 2012-13. Nationally, charter schools grew by 7 percent.

CHARTER SCHOOL · A4

Even if charters are a good option for students, most districts hope never to see a charter proposal because of the financial drain, Propel Schools Foundation's executive director Jeremy Resnick said. Propel operates nine charters in Allegheny County.

"We have a lot of districts (in Pennsylvania) with only one charter school under its purview," he said. "If I were that superintendent, why would I want to sink my limited resources in that one school when I have so many other pressing needs?"

Home school districts bear the responsibility and cost of busing students to charter schools within 10 miles of their home districts.

Brentwood school board member David Schaap told legislators in a recent meeting that his district — whose students almost exclusively walk to school — pays $23,000 a year to bus three students to nearby charters.

Intricate review process

Six years ago, educator Derrick Lopez joined corporate, foundation and community leaders from Pittsburgh on a pilgrimage to Harlem seeking innovative school solutions. From that effort sprung the idea for Homewood Children's Village Collegiate Charter School, a facility he said would be a microcosm of intervention strategies in play at Pittsburgh's Lincoln, Faison and Westinghouse schools.

Lopez, a former assistant superintendent for Pittsburgh Public Schools, said in November that his new school should be a shoo-in for charter approval. In February, the Pittsburgh Public Board of Directors said no. Lopez did not return calls.

District spokeswoman Ebony Pugh said the review process includes principals, budget analysts, architects and experts on curriculum, instruction and other topics. They make a recommendation to Superintendent Linda Lane. She presents the findings to the board.

In the report, board members said the children's village failed to provide an approved governance structure or financial plan, a comprehensive curriculum and proof that it offered choices different or better than those available at PPS — all required by state law.

Pittsburgh schools denied 16 of 18 charter applications since 2009. Officials said $54.9 million this year will go to 10 charters.

Hippert estimated the other seven Allegheny County school districts that have authorized charters lost about $58 million in 2012-13, varying from $14,298 per student in Quaker Valley to $7,719 in South Allegheny.

Sen. Jim Brewster, D-McKeesport, said the capital sacrificed by traditional districts, especially to cyber charters, goes largely unseen.

"The light bill, the heat bill, insurance — all the things that are hidden from the public become a real drain on a school district," he said.

Charter school officials argue their expenses often go unnoticed. Propel twice tried to purchase the former home of Columbus K-5 for its Northside school, which opened in 2011. Co-principal Sarah Mahon likened the experience to apartment living: "We can put up decorations, maybe paint a few walls, but until we own the building, we

Tribune-Review

Date: Monday, March 17, 2014
Location: GREENSBURG, PA
Circulation (DMA): 104,962 (22)
Type (Frequency): Newspaper (D)
Page: 1,4
Section: Main
Keyword: Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh

can't really make it our own."

Linda Lindsey, 45, of Chartiers spent years checking waiting lists at city charters before Propel Northside chose her son, Sharod, 12. They loved Westwood K-5, but with classes of 30 or more kids, Sharod was not getting the one-on-one instruction he needed, Lindsey said.

"With a small group setting, if he has a question or isn't paying attention for a second and misses something, he can catch up," she said. "I knew he could excel, and now he's on the honor roll. He never did that before."

Legislation proposed

Stalled in the Senate since late January, Senate Bill 1085 would allow up to 100 Pennsylvania colleges and universities to approve charter schools, as in New York, Michigan and 11 other states. The state's 1997 law permits all 500 public districts to authorize a charter — only 44 have done so.

Some educators contend the legislation would allow too many authorizers and add to the friction.

Cetel and others argue that less than 9 percent of districts opt to oversee charters. Major universities are not likely to jump at the chance right away, either, he said.

"If you just have local districts making these decisions, you'll never see progress," Cetel said.

Of the 124 appeal applications received by the State Charter School Appeal Board since its inception, 48 were approved, either granting a charter or reversing a revocation, including Propel Hazelwood late last year. When it opens in the former home of St. Stephen Catholic School this fall, the K-6 school will be the neighborhood's first since Pittsburgh closed Burgwin — where Propel first hoped to open — in 2006 and Gladstone in 2001.

Rep. Jake Wheatley, D-Hill District, said problems will continue if lawmakers don't endorse a more equitable system soon.

"There was a reason why charters and cybers and all these other nontraditional systems exploded," he said, citing underserved children in neighborhoods where public schools lack resources or close.

Megan Harris is a staff writer for Trib Total Media.

By the numbers

With 44 districts that have authorized charter schools, Pennsylvania ties for sixth among the 43 states that permit charter schools.

California 314
Wisconsin 99
Oregon 73
Ohio 67
Colorado 47
Florida 44
Pennsylvania 44
Georgia 38
Michigan 33
Minnesota 29

Source: National Association of Charter School Authorizers

Account: 10811 (1383)
PA-154
For reprints or rights, please contact the publisher

Tribune-Review

Date: Monday, March 17, 2014
Location: GREENSBURG, PA
Circulation (DMA): 104,962 (22)
Type (Frequency): Newspaper (D)
Page: 1,4
Section: Main
Keyword: Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh

Tracking charter schools

Pennsylvania has 176 charter schools among 44 authorizing districts, including 12 districts in Allegheny, Beaver and Westmoreland counties.

Charter school	Authorizing school district	Location	Enrollment
ALLEGHENY COUNTY			
Academy	Pittsburgh Public Schools	Baldwin	186
Career Connections	Pittsburgh Public Schools	Lawrenceville	241
City	Pittsburgh Public Schools	Downtown	622
Environmental at Frick Park	Pittsburgh Public Schools	Regent Square	523
Manchester Academic	Pittsburgh Public Schools	Manchester	249
Penn Hills for Entrepreneurship	Penn Hills	Verona	316
Propel Pitcairn	Gateway	Pitcairn	242
Propel Braddock Hills	Woodland Hills	Braddock Hills	552
Propel East	Penn Hills and Woodland Hills	Turtle Creek	404
Propel Hazelwood	Pittsburgh Public Schools	Hazelwood	N/A
Propel Homestead	Steel Valley	Homestead	585
Propel McKeesport	McKeesport	McKeesport	393
Propel Montour	Montour	Kennedy Township	415
Propel Northside	Pittsburgh Public Schools	North Side	234
Spectrum	Gateway	Monroeville	32
Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh	Pittsburgh Public Schools	East Liberty	214
Urban Pathways K-5 College	Pittsburgh Public Schools	Downtown	215
Urban Pathways 6-12	Pittsburgh Public Schools	Downtown	347
Young Scholars of Western Pennsylvania	Baldwin-Whitehall	Baldwin Township	178
BEAVER COUNTY			
Baden Academy	Ambridge Area	Baden	210
Beaver Area Academic	Beaver Area	Beaver	92
Lincoln Park Performing Arts	Midland Borough	Midland	609
WESTMORELAND COUNTY			
Dr. Robert Ketterer Inc.	Greater Latrobe	Latrobe	191

Source: Pa. Department of Education

TRIBUNE-REVIEW