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PROVIDING INFORMATION ON RESOURCES AND EVENTS THAT IMPROVE THE LIFESTYLE OF INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES IN OUR COMMUNITY

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Week of August 6, 2025

Congressman Danny K. Davis, not Seeking Re-election after legendary Public Service

Supports State Representative LaShawn Ford as Successor

By Creola Thomas



Congressman Danny K. Davis announcing he will not seek re-election for the office of 7th Congressional District of Illinois.

In a momentous announcement, U.S. Representative Danny Davis (D-Ill.) revealed that he will not seek reelection in 2026, bringing to a close a distinguished tenure spanning 15 terms in the House of Representatives. At 83 years old, Davis said it was time to “pass the

torch” to a new generation of leaders who will continue fighting for the values he’s long championed. He will serve in office as Congressman of the 7th Congressional District until January 2027 when his term ends.

Davis has represented Illinois’ 7th

Congressional District since 1997, an area that includes downtown Chicago and stretches into the West Side, South Side, and nearby suburbs. Known as a progressive voice and a fierce advocate for civil rights, Davis used his platform to push for expanded health care access, education equity,

and criminal justice reform.

His retirement adds to a wave of leadership changes in Illinois, with four congressional seats now open due to retirements and Senate bids.

In a move that has already begun to shape the 2026 primary landscape, Davis gave his official endorsement



Illinois State Representative LaShawn K. Ford (8th District) was chosen by Congressman Davis as his pick for the successor of his congressional seat of office, which will end in January of 2027.

to Illinois State Representative La Shawn K. Ford, calling him “young, energetic, and ready.”

Ford, 53, has represented the 8th District in the Illinois General Assembly since 2007. A former CPS teacher and real estate developer, he has been a visible

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Unhealthy Air Quality from Canadian Wildfires

Canadian federal officials warn 2025 to be worst wildfire season on record



Chicago-Skyline-at-Dusk.gif

Chicago area residents have been grappling with declining air quality over the past several days as smoke from widespread Canadian wildfires continues to drift into the region. The lingering haze, fueled by one of the worst wildfire seasons in Canadian history, has pushed the city’s air quality index (AQI)

into unhealthy levels, especially for vulnerable populations.

The sight of Chicago’s skyline cloaked in grayish haze has become an unsettling norm this summer. On August 2, AccuWeather reported an AQI deemed “unhealthy” for all individuals. By August 3, AirNow.gov recorded a PM2.5 AQI of

92—classified as “moderate”—showing some improvement, yet still a concern, particularly for those with underlying health conditions.

The culprit: smoke particles known as PM2.5 (particulate matter smaller than 2.5 micrometers), which are small enough to penetrate deep into the lungs and bloodstream. These

pollutants, when inhaled, can trigger a wide range of health problems.

While the entire population has been advised to limit prolonged outdoor activity, health experts are especially concerned about “sensitive groups.” This includes

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The North Lawndale Community News

The North Lawndale Community News is published weekly by Strategic Human Services. Our purpose is to help inform the communities we serve on resources, events, and issues relevant to them. Our community includes those who live, work, worship in, and/or care about North Lawndale and its neighboring communities. Our focus is on positive, productive solutions, that will improve the lifestyle of community members.

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North Lawndale Celebrates BP Station Grand Reopening

By Chevette Conley

Change is always in motion across Chicago's 77 neighborhoods, and North Lawndale is no exception. Home to more than 34,820 residents, this West Side community is experiencing steady growth under the leadership of Alderwoman Monique Scott.

Rich in history, North Lawndale marked its 150th anniversary in 2019, an occasion even celebrated by the POWER gas station at 3939 W. Ogden Avenue. Six years later, the neighborhood gathered again—this time to celebrate the station's transformation into a brand-new BP.

The grand reopening took place Friday, July 18, 2025, drawing a crowd eager to see the remodeled interior,



See Gas Station page 3

Residents lined up for the free food at Grand Re-opening of BP Gas Station.



Alex Joseph, owner of BP gas station, formerly Power gas station at 3939 W. Ogden Ave.

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The Big Beautiful Bill Act

By Professor Zaki Amir

Chicago native Gil Scott-Heron, one of the “Last Poets” before going solo, once asked: “After all is said and done, who will survive in America?” In that same spirit, we must now ask: What is a ‘Big Beautiful Bill’?

The essence of the legislation is straightforward:

First, the tax cuts that began during President Trump’s first administration in 2017 will be extended under the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act — to the tune of \$3.7 trillion — a move certain to impact the U.S. Treasury’s coffers.

Second, \$9 billion is earmarked for “Arctic Security,” aimed at enhancing the U.S. Coast Guard’s capabilities with new vessels and aircraft — the largest upgrade investment in its history.

Third, healthcare and nutrition programs face close evaluation, with projections showing potentially disastrous effects on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), relied on by millions.

Fourth, domestic manufacturing receives targeted boosts, including no taxes on tips for restaurant workers (a first-term promise), no taxes on overtime pay, and reduced loan interest for purchasing American-made vehicles.

Fifth, the bill was passed via “budget reconciliation,” a fast-track legislative procedure in the Senate that limits amendments and bypasses the filibuster.

The Nitty Gritty

At its core, the bill aims to spur economic growth while cutting social programs — measures that will likely impact low-income households and those dependent on government assistance. Fiscal policy between the previous Democratic administration and the current Republican one could not be more different.

By the numbers:

1. \$3.7 trillion in tax cuts over the next decade — revenue the government will forego.
2. Cuts to healthcare and food assistance — details found in H.R. 1, One Big Beautiful Bill Act (Congressional Budget Office).
3. New EV purchase tax credits — explained in Trump’s ‘Big Beautiful Bill’ Offers Car Tax Credits to Add to Biden’s.

President Donald J. Trump calls this his effort to “revive the American economy.” As with any contract, the fine print matters — ignore it, and you may pay, as the saying goes, “through the nose.”

A Historical Lens

Chicago has seen its share of political heroes and “sheroes.” The bill’s rapid passage — pushed through before the July 4 deadline — reflects a Congress bowing to #47 (who was also #45).

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once came to Chicago to expose the failures of both federal and city governments in achieving any semblance of parity for Afrodendants — the term agreed upon by 19 nations of the slavery diaspora in La Ceiba, Honduras in 2002.

We are, as Booker T. Washington’s 1901 autobiography puts it, “Up From Slavery.”

Chicago’s Roosevelt University holds the nation’s largest collection on the New Deal — a reminder of how America once recovered from economic collapse. Understanding that era may help citizens make sense of today’s fiscal shifts.

More Than Numbers

While Trump’s “One Big Beautiful Bill” is framed as a win for workers, farmers, and America’s future, the reality is that its impact will be felt most immediately in people’s paychecks. The deeper question is whether this moment demands not just economic reform, but also an overhaul of political leadership at every level.

Chicago’s history — rich in both political protest and political corruption — raises Gil

Scott-Heron’s question anew: What will you do to survive in America?

From Lyndon B. Johnson’s 1965 Howard University commencement address to Dr. King’s vision of the “Promised Land,” the message remains: unity, not policy alone, is the key to liberation.

As we consider this “Big Beautiful Bill,” Chicago must also consider its role in the liberation of self and community. As Trump himself has framed it, this is about “liberation” — but the responsibility to define and achieve it rests with us.

For those who wish to reflect further, listen to Gil Scott-Heron’s Who’ll Pay Reparations on My Soul? — and ask yourself what freedom truly costs.



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Gas Station from page 2

refuel their tanks, and reconnect with neighbors. The station’s owner, Alex Joseph, greeted guests with his trademark warm smile. A devoted community member, Joseph invested \$50,000 into renovations, adding eight casino-style gaming machines for a bit of fun during visits.

“This isn’t just a gas station—it’s a gathering place,” Joseph said. “I want everyone to feel welcome here.”

To mark the occasion, Joseph hosted a community barbecue complete with grilled chicken, juicy hamburgers, and Chicago-style hot dogs. Snacks, drinks, and reduced gas

See Gas Station page 7

Temperature Check on the Westside with Lawndale Christian Health Center CEO Dr. James Brooks

By Todd Thomas

**Loving God. Loving People.
Rev. Dr. James Brooks, CEO**

NLCN: What are your thoughts on the shooting at Douglass Park swimming pool and LCHC's role?

Brooks: "What happened at Douglass Park was evil personified. Anytime violence touches our community, especially harming our children, it leaves a deep wound — emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Our hearts are heavy. We are praying for Jeremy's recovery and lifting up the family of young Marjay, who tragically lost his life. No family should have to endure such pain.

At Lawndale Christian Health Center, we see our role as a place of healing and hope. We care for the physical injuries, yes, but we also walk alongside people in their trauma — offering access to integrated behavioral health services and creating space for people to grieve, process, and begin healing. Beyond that, we remain deeply committed to addressing the root causes of violence through strong partnerships, and simply showing up — being a steady, compassionate presence in this community we love."

NLCN: For Minority Mental Health Month in July what is LCHC doing in support?

Brooks: "It's okay to say you are not okay!"

July is a reminder of the disparities that exist in mental health care, particularly for communities of color. At LCHC, we're using this month to raise awareness, reduce stigma, and encourage people to seek help. We're highlighting resources through our clinics and on social media, sharing stories of hope, and encouraging open conversations. We're also continuing to integrate mental health support into primary care, because mental and physical health are deeply connected."

NLCN: Status and main function of the Academic Building under construction on Ogden?

Brooks: "The Academic Building is moving forward, and we're excited. Construction is progressing, and when it's complete, this space will serve as a hub for developing our future workforce, expanding our optometry services, and offering a beautiful space for our seniors to receive quality care.

We'll be able to train doctors, medical assistants, and others right here in North

Lawndale. It's about equipping people — many from our own community — with skills that lead to meaningful employment while strengthening the quality of care we provide."

NLCN: When is The annual 5K Run?

Brooks: "Lawndale Fitness Center's 5k



Rev. Dr. James Brooks, Pastor of Harmony Community Church, located at 1908 South Millard Avenue and CEO of Lawndale Christian Health Center 3860 W Ogden Ave, and multiple other locations.

is on Saturday, September 27th. It's always one of my favorite gatherings of the year. We expect strong participation because this event reflects who we are: people coming together for health, community, and fun. It's not just

about fitness; it's about neighbors walking and running side by side, showing that we care about each other and the place we call home."

See Brooks page 7

Rite Way, Stone Temple, Community Leaders Join Forces to Boost Literacy and Fight Substance Abuse on the Westside of Chicago

Local leaders and organizations are stepping up their efforts to promote literacy, provide community resources, and address substance abuse challenges in the neighborhood.

The Right Way Association, led by Eric Williams, has teamed up with Pastor Fitzpatrick of Stone Temple Church and several community partners to distribute free books to youth, install free book libraries across the neighborhood, and offer year-round literacy programs.

"We're improving resources in the community by getting books into the hands of our young people, especially 16-year-olds," Williams said. "In partnership with Pastor Reshorna Fitzpatrick, we're making sure these books are available all year, free of charge."

The initiative is about more than just books. The group is also confronting the heroin epidemic head-on by distributing Narcan to local churches and training members on how to use it. "We're linking people to hospitals and health services while ensuring our churches are equipped to save lives," Williams explained.

Sheila Gray, a member of New Upper Room Missionary Baptist church, 2709 West Roosevelt Rd., expressed enthusiasm about joining forces with the Right Way Association and Stone Temple Church. She

said their partnership will focus on literacy, financial literacy, violence prevention, and substance abuse prevention.

Dorothy Wright, a community advocate, shared her dedication to helping people of all ages, especially youth in the Lawndale area. "This is about giving our young people hope and tools for success," she said.

Pastor Fitzpatrick, who runs an existing literacy program, highlighted her "garden reading" initiative, where children can read aloud to practice public speaking. "We want to help kids overcome fear and develop confidence," she said. Her group also operates a free library in the garden, provides food to residents, and serves as a local resource center.

Pastor Fitzpatrick announced that the community reading program will be held every Monday from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. in the garden. The sessions will give children a chance to read books on stage, engage with peers, and discover stories that reflect their own experiences.

"Our young people need to see characters who look like them and stories that speak to their lives," Fitzpatrick said. "Representation matters, and it's part of how we take responsibility for improving our community."

Action plans include distributing books to teenagers, installing community book



Sheila Gray, Eric Williams, Dorothy Wright, Pastor Reshorna Fitzpatrick joined together to provide literacy and fight Substance Abuse.

libraries, expanding reading programs, and continuing substance abuse outreach with Narcan distribution and training. Food provided at community events — such as Subway sandwiches, chips, drinks, and salads — will help bring residents together in a warm, welcoming environment.

The speakers agreed that in an age dominated by social media and technology, building a culture of reading is essential. "Books open doors," Williams said. "When we invest in literacy, we invest in the future of North Lawndale."

Davis from front page

advocate on issues such as education reform, economic development, and reentry support for formerly incarcerated individuals—core themes that echo Davis's legacy.

"I am honored to have the support of Congressman Davis," Ford said in a statement. "His shoes are impossible to fill, but I am committed to building on his work and continuing to fight for the dignity and opportunity our communities deserve."

Observers expect Ford's campaign to lean

heavily on grassroots organizing, his West Side base, and longstanding relationships with faith-based and neighborhood organizations.

While Ford may have the early edge with Davis's blessing, the open seat is expected to draw multiple contenders.

Born in Arkansas and raised in the segregated South, Danny Davis moved to Chicago to pursue higher education and public service. Before entering Congress, he served as a Chicago alderman and Cook

County commissioner.

In Washington, Davis became known for his moral clarity and consistency on social justice issues. He was a key supporter of the Affordable Care Act, a longtime advocate for Second Chance Act legislation, and a champion of historically Black colleges and universities.

He also held leadership roles in the Congressional Black Caucus and was a vocal critic of cuts to social services.

"Danny Davis taught us that political

office is a platform for service," said Rev. Jesse Jackson Sr. in a recent statement. "He never forgot where he came from—and he never stopped fighting for the people he represented."

As Chicago and the nation reflect on his tenure, there is growing recognition that Davis's departure marks the end of a generational era of Black political leadership rooted in the civil rights movement and neighborhood-based activism.

Redemptive Plastics: A Transformative Approach to Environmental Justice and Workforce Development in Austin

By Todd Thomas

In the heart of Chicago's Austin neighborhood, Redemptive Plastics is redefining how we approach recycling, environmental justice, youth development, and faith. This innovativenonprofit organization, founded just three years ago, has launched a multifaceted initiative that does more than clean up the environment—it's giving youth job skills, cultivating creativity, and empowering the community.

The journey began with a straightforward mission: recycle plastic, primarily using detergentbottles from local laundromats. However, the process was fraught with challenges. The detergent bottles, often contaminated with residue, proved difficult to clean and recycle. But Redemptive Plastics shifted focus and found a new material to work with—plastic beer can holders, known as Paktechs.

Redemptive Plastics works to collect, sort, and melt these plastic bottle caps into durable,colorful plastic lumber. The result is high-quality benches, chairs, and tables, often with unique, eye-catching designs that show how recycling can be both functional and beautiful. The program not only aims to keep plastics out of landfills, but it also creates tangible products that serve the local community.

Much of the work is done by local youth employees, known as cohorts. Darrius Mathis, a two-year veteran of the program, has found an outlet for his creativity while

also learning valuable job skills.“My role is as an innovator,” Mathis explains. “I help develop new ideas. I’m a voice and innovator for the brand, from the visual concepts to the marketing and execution of the products, and I come up with full blueprints on paper.” knew a handful about recycling before I started here, but I didn’t understand why it was so important,” he said. “People told me it’s good for the Earth, but once I dug deeper, I realized the true potential of recycling. There are different types of plastics, and they have different impacts on the Earth.”

Redemptive Plastics also collaborates with other organizations . One of these partnerships includes working with Hood Heroes, a youth-driven initiative focused on beautifying neighborhoods while teaching environmental stewardship. “Coming here gives them a deeper understanding of what we can do with plastic. It’s something we encounter every day in our homes. It’s made them more mindful about how to dispose of plastic, and see it as a resource rather than waste,” said youth director Vada. “It’s about showing the kids that they can make a difference.”

This sense of community and collaboration ties back to Redemptive Plastics’ founding principles, which are grounded in both art and faith, according to Co-founder Jordan Campbell.

“We have to think about workforce



Redemptive Plastics Cohorts, which is their job title.

development, and we have to think about job opportunities,” Campbell said. “Some kids who come into the program have never held a job before and they gain that experience. We wanted to educate the young folks around environmental justice and be more than a symbol but a chance to redeem not only plastic, but our community.”

And all this is being done in the old bank building located across from the CTA Green Line on Corcoran Street.

The outside still looks like a bank, but inside is a beehive of activity that is still growing.

“When people see this building I want them to think about art, faith and community,” Campbell said. “Beyond that I want them to understand the importance of themselves, the importance of their communities and understand the importance of their environment. Faith is key, we wouldn’t be here without it... that’s what makes all of this possible.”



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A man wearing a black hoodie with a white Nike swoosh on the chest is holding a clear plastic water bottle. He is standing in front of a store with a pink sign that says "WE PROST". The store has shelves with various products, including jars and containers.

As Gospel Temple reflects on the past year, the church gives thanks to its leadership, volunteers, sponsors, and the GT family. In keeping with its guiding principle from Proverbs 19:17 — “Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and He will reward them for what they have done” — the pantry remains committed to its motto: Take what you need, leave what you can.



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Journee Barry, 15-year-old girl was reported missing since May, 2025. Latest update CPD cancelled the missing person alert

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Gas Station from page 3



Hamburgers and Chicken was on the Menu

prices—\$2.99 per gallon for three days—added to the celebratory atmosphere.

North Lawndale, predominantly African American (70%), with a growing Hispanic population (23%) and a small percentage of white residents (4%), is known for its vibrant culture. The neighborhood's heart beats in spaces like Douglas Park, where festivals light up the summer, and local gems such as the Lawndale Christian Health Center and Green Tomato Café.

With its new BP station, 3939 W. Ogden has become more than a pit stop—it's now a place where residents meet, laugh, and share stories. In North Lawndale, even a gas station can bring the community closer together.



Brooks from page 4

NLCN: Trump's budget and potential impact on LCHC and those you serve?

Brooks: "Any proposal that reduces access to care for the most vulnerable will have a real impact on communities like ours. We are watching closely, advocating for our patients, and preparing to adjust if needed. No matter what happens, our commitment remains the same: to show and share the love of Jesus by promoting wellness and providing quality health care for Lawndale and our neighboring communities."

NLCN: Is there anything else you would like to add:

Brooks: "My deepest desire is to see more of our neighbors in North Lawndale connected to a primary care provider — someone they trust and see at least once a year. When people have regular access to care, we can catch problems

early, prevent illness, and support their overall well-being. Far too often, families end up using the emergency room for non-emergencies, not because they want to, but because they don't feel they have another option. This puts additional pressure on our safety-net hospitals and can leave people without the kind of consistent, preventive care they deserve.

At LCHC, we want to change that story. We want every resident to know there is a place for them — where they will be seen, heard, and cared for — not just in a crisis, but throughout their journey toward health.

I'd just emphasize how grateful I am for our team — from the front desk to our providers to our admin and outreach teams. The work we do is not easy, but it matters deeply. Every day I see lives being changed, and that keeps me hopeful about the future."

Air Quality from front page

children, seniors, and individuals with asthma, COPD, heart disease, or other respiratory issues.

"Exposure to this level of air pollution can significantly worsen conditions like asthma and heart disease," says Dr. Melissa Johnson, a pulmonary specialist at Rush University Medical Center. "We're advising people in at-risk groups to stay indoors, run air purifiers if possible, and contact their doctors if symptoms flare up."

Typical symptoms reported include coughing, wheezing, chest pain, shortness of breath, and fatigue. Some individuals with cardiovascular issues are even at risk for more severe outcomes such as heart attacks or strokes.

The impact has stretched beyond health. Schools, outdoor fitness classes, summer camps, and public events have either modified or canceled activities in response to poor air quality. "Normally we'd take our kids to play in the park," says Rosa Martinez, a mother of two from Little Village. "But with the smoke and air warnings, we've been staying inside all week. It's frustrating, but we don't want to risk our children's health."

Transportation and routine errands have also been affected. Officials suggest combining errands, avoiding drive-thrus to reduce idling emissions, and using indoor spaces for exercise. Visibility has declined in some areas, posing additional hazards for drivers and cyclists.

Canada's wildfire season has reached alarming levels, with federal officials predicting continued fire risk through August. The U.S. National Interagency Fire Center warned of above-average fire activity across much of Western Canada due to a dangerous combination of hotter, drier weather and accumulated vegetation acting as fuel.

"This is shaping up to be one of the worst wildfire seasons on record," said a spokesperson for the Canadian Wildland Fire Information System. "And it's not just a Canadian problem. Smoke doesn't respect borders."

Climate change is a key factor in the

increasing frequency and intensity of wildfires. Experts note that fire seasons are not only becoming longer—starting earlier and ending later—but also more destructive. As a result, smoke-related air quality problems in U.S. cities like Chicago may become more common in future summers.

Thankfully, resources are available to help Chicagoans, especially those with respiratory issues, navigate this environmental health crisis.

Local organizations like the American Lung Association (ALA), the Respiratory Health Association, and the Breathe Chicago Center provide information and support for managing asthma, COPD, and other lung conditions. The ALA's Lung HelpLine (1-800-LUNGUSA) connects callers to nurses and respiratory therapists for personalized advice.

Health officials also recommend the following:

- Stay informed by checking AQI updates from sources like AirNow.gov and the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency.
- Stay indoors as much as possible and run air conditioners in recirculation mode.
- Use air purifiers with HEPA filters and avoid ind or activities that create pollution, like smoking or burning candles.
- Wear N95 masks outdoors to filter out harmful particles—though these may not be suitable for young children or those with lung conditions.
- Follow your action plan if you have asthma or COPD, and consult your physician if symptoms worsen.

As officials continue to monitor both local air conditions and Canada's wildfire outlook, the immediate advice remains clear: prioritize your health, especially if you're in a sensitive group.

While the smoke may eventually clear, the deeper issues—climate change, forest management, and urban preparedness—will remain long after the haze lifts.

"Air quality is now a seasonal concern," said Dr. Johnson. "We need to start treating it like we do severe weather—plan, protect, and stay informed."

For the latest air quality updates, visit www.AirNow.gov or check local news and weather services.

THE 2025 BLACK WOMEN'S EXPO

30 Years of Empowerment and Entertainment

By Ms. Chevette M. Conley

From Friday, August 1 to Sunday, August 3, 2025, the Black Women's Expo returned to McCormick Place, marking its 30th anniversary with three days of business networking, entertainment, and inspiration. The event drew numerous vendors who reserved booths in advance, showcasing a variety of products and services. Attendees enjoyed daily live entertainment, making this year's expo a true celebration of culture, community, and achievement.

Day One kicked off with soulful performances from Maurice Mahon and Raheem DeVaughn. Their energy and talent had the audience singing along, clapping, and cheering with joy. Day Two brought the powerful voices of Simone Green, Teresa Griffin, and Sandy Redd, each delivering show-stopping performances that captivated the crowd.

Day Three, the grand finale, featured talk show host and author Tamron Hall alongside gospel recording artist Marvin Sapp. Hall shared stories of her early career, the mentors who supported her, and her love for her son, Moses. She expressed her deep affection for Chicago, taking photos with fans both in the audience and backstage, and graciously accepting gifts. Samantha Chatman, investigative reporter for ABC 7 News, served as the event's engaging host. She interviewed Hall, interacted warmly with attendees, and was praised for her beauty, talent, and approachable personality.

Marin Sapp closed the event with a heartfelt performance that had the audience singing along from start to finish.



Tamron Hall at Black Women's Expo

Beyond the stage, the expo floor was filled with unique products. One standout was a family-run peanut brittle business, started by a father and now continued by his children. Attendees eagerly sampled the treat and purchased bags to take home. Organizers Merry Green and Chelsea Whittington were congratulated for producing another successful, inspiring event.

The 2025 Black Women's Expo once again proved why it remains one of Chicago's most anticipated annual celebrations of Black women's excellence.



Raheem DeVaughn - Soulful RB Singer



Jewelry Entrepreneur at Black Women's Expo



Crowd at Women's Black Expo



Young Entrepreneur Lemonade and Tea sellers

From Pillar to Purpose

By: Creola Thomas



Mr. Charles Odum, his son Ifeanyi Odum, Jory Johnson, Ifeanyi's step-son in their youth program. At a North Lawndale Community News podcast session showcasing the jewelry that they make.

As surely as seasons change, so do people. I met Mr. Charles Odum on a Monday in his office, where he was cheerful, hopeful, and brimming with creativity. Odum reflected on his 77 years in the 24th Ward—a place he has not only called home but served as a community pillar, holding the stories and history of the neighborhood.

A co-founder of Chicago Fashion magazine—which once featured stars like Reggie Theus, considered by many to be the “Michael Jordan” of his time—Odum helped produce a Midwest regional publication spanning six states. Alongside his wife Ingrid, an esteemed fashion designer, he also launched Dove's Eye, a jewelry-making business that continues to this day.

Odum's journey has not been without challenges. When his family arrived in the 24th Ward in the early 1950s, they were the first African American family in what was then a predominantly Jewish neighborhood. By 1953, more Black families began moving in, many displaced from the South, finding work in low-paying, labor-intensive jobs without benefits or job security. Some started small businesses, and for a time, the community thrived.

But racial tensions and social unrest soon changed the landscape. In 1968, during the riots following Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination, many businesses were burned and never reopened. Safety became uncertain, and mistrust grew. The 1970s brought further division, while the 1980s ushered in police brutality,

discriminatory policies, and “white flight,” which stripped the neighborhood of jobs and resources. Odum recalls how President Reagan's push for businesses to pull advertising from Black-owned publications dealt a devastating blow to urban media outlets like his.

The 1990s saw rising gang violence and a shift from “us versus them” to “us versus us,” as self-destruction took root in many underserved communities. Yet, despite decades of struggle, hope remains.

Today, Odum and his son, Ifeanyi Odum, are working to restore the 24th Ward's promise through their nonprofit, The Union to End Slums (UES). In partnership with Greater Open Doors and Youth Outreach Services, they run a paid training program for young adults aged 18–24, offering skills in photography, jewelry making, website design, graphic design, and e-commerce. Their mission is to create pathways to generational wealth and inspire young people to see themselves as more than stereotypes.

“This community can produce more than rappers and thugs,” Ifeanyi says. “We can raise businessmen who are God-centered and motivated to positively impact the community.”

For the Odums, the goal is clear: to move from the pain of the past toward a purpose-filled future. The 24th Ward has endured decades of hardship, but with leaders like Charles and Ifeanyi Odum, it still holds the promise of renewal.

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