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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 October 20, 2025

BMO Bank Opens New Branch at Aspire Center, Symbolizing Austin Community Westside Transformation



(l-r) Darnell Shields, CEO Austin Coming Together; Eva Broun BMO, Alma Velasquez Community Giving Manager of BMO, Ron Milsap of BMO, Melissa Cleveland BMO Market President, Tyrone Parks, Senior Retail Relationship Banker, BMO, Taloyta Strickland, BMO Retail Relationship Banker, Lucas Sandoval, BMO Branch Manager, Jill Bush 29 Ward (Ald. Taliaferro), Morris Reed, Executive Director Westside Health Authority, Christopher Parker, BMO Senior Regional Strategist, Congressman Danny Davis, and State Rep. La Shawn Ford.

The grand opening and ribbon cutting ceremony of a BMO bank branch at the newly completed Aspire Center for Workforce Innovation in the Austin Community celebrated a significant milestone in community development, bringing more financial services to an area that has been underserved for years.

The Center use to be Robert Emmet Elementary School repurposed after being vacant for many years. The former school was built in 1911 and closed in 2013. After sitting vacant for years, the building was purchased by the Westside Health Authority in 2018, leading to a community-driven redevelopment into the Aspire Center

for Workforce Innovation, which just opened this summer in 2025.

Christopher Parker, BMO Senior Regional Strategist opened the ceremony by emphasizing that the people of Austin are the true heroes of the day's story. The event began with a prayer led by Pastor Robbie Wilkerson, who blessed the gathering and the new

“West Side Voices Speak Out: Davis and Ford Warn of Consequences from Government Shutdown”



State Rep LaShawn Ford, Lawndale resident Tanya and Congressman Danny Davis after speaking with seniors about government shutdown.

In a heartfelt and at times heated community gathering at the Fannie Emanuel Apartments on Chicago's West Side, Congressman Danny K. Davis and State Representative LaShawn Ford met with senior residents to address growing anxieties over the ongoing federal government shutdown. The event, part community meeting and part impromptu town hall, drew attendees seeking clarity on how stalled federal funding might affect their healthcare, food assistance, and other essential services.

Held at 3916 W. Washington Blvd., the meeting opened with Congressman Davis reaffirming his commitment to healthcare access, particularly through the Affordable Care Act—legislation he helped craft. Davis highlighted his success in securing \$6 billion for home visiting programs aimed at supporting young pregnant women and emphasized the importance of premium tax credits that make insurance affordable for working families. “Without these credits,” Davis warned, “families could lose coverage or face skyrocketing costs.”

State Rep. LaShawn Ford followed with a personal reflection on his upbringing in Cabrini-Green and his journey from public school teacher to real estate entrepreneur and state legislator. Ford thanked Davis for his mentorship and endorsement in his congressional bid, sharing that their recent trip to Washington D.C. included a meeting with Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries, who expressed strong

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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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BMO Aspire from page facility, asking that it become "more than just a financial institution" but a source of empowerment, opportunity, and growth for the Austin community.

Darnell Shields from Austin Coming Together provided opening remarks, noting that BMO had been a cornerstone investor in the project for over seven years, demonstrating long-term commitment to the community. He highlighted how BMO's early belief and continued support made the day possible, emphasizing that the new branch would help residents build wealth, start businesses, and achieve financial goals.

State Representative La Shawn Ford spoke about the significance of bringing financial opportunities to Austin. He noted that many communities still face predatory lending practices and check-cashing services, making this bank branch crucial for community development. Ford mentioned that in recent days, they had opened two banks in the area, including this one, and even installed ATMs, which had previously required residents to travel to Oak Park.

Congressman Danny Davis described the day as "a good day for the people," highlighting the continued development of the West Side of Chicago under the



Aspire Center Lobby, location of BMO Bank ribbon cutting ceremony 5500 W Madison St.

leadership of community figures like Morris Reed and Darnell Shields. He emphasized the importance of having a financial institution where community members can bring their dreams—whether for homes, businesses, or education—and find support and capital.

The Director of Community Engagement for the 29th Ward Office, Ms Jill R. Bush was at the event representing Ald Chris Taliaferro. Mr. Bush welcomed BMO Harris Bank to the 29th Ward and gave thanks to them for being at the Aspire Center.

The BMO Market President Melissa Cleveland, expressed honor in celebrating the official grand opening at the Aspire Center. She described the center as more

than just a building but a symbol of possibility when vision, collaboration, and community investment come together. Since the branch's soft opening, clients have been accessing resources they need and deserve. She emphasized that BMO's commitment is to help transform Austin and support residents in taking meaningful steps toward financial goals.

Morris Reed, Executive Director of the Westside Health Authority spoke about the importance of relationships with financial institutions, noting that for many years, Austin did not have such relationships. He expressed gratitude to BMO for establishing a presence in the neighborhood, allowing residents to build these crucial financial relationships.

Christopher Parker, BMO Senior Regional Strategist for a zero energy business program, acknowledged various partners and organizations that worked to make the vision a reality. He emphasized that they were not just investing in physical infrastructure but in people and possibilities, creating access to jobs, education, homeownership, and entrepreneurship.

The local staff for the BMO Harris Bank at the Aspire Center is Tyrone Parks, Senior Retail Relationship Banker, Taloyta Strickland, BMO Retail Relationship Banker, and Lucas Sandoval, BMO Branch Manager

The ceremony concluded with a ribbon-cutting, with attendees shouting "Austin!" in celebration. Guests were invited to enjoy food and dessert, take photos, and listen to live music by South City Collective while supporting vendors upstairs. Some of the vendors selling on the outside terrace were 40 acres Fresh Market and Joibilee Popping Co. was selling popcorn. Thank God 4 Vegan Treats with CEO/Founder, Michelle Scott provided catered refreshments on the ground level. And Charlene Boyd of Char BP Events was the event planning for the ceremony.

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Loretto Hospital Supports Local Women with Free Mammograms in October

In recognition of Breast Cancer Awareness Month Loretto Hospital is offering free mammograms for uninsured and underinsured residents of the Austin, Berwyn and Cicero communities throughout the month of October.

One in eight women in the U.S. will face a diagnosis of invasive breast cancer during their lifetime. It ranks as the second most common cancer among women and is also the second leading cause of cancer related death.

“Early detection is vital for individuals diagnosed with breast cancer and providing access to this care annually is one of our top priorities,” said Mary Rinder, Director of Diagnostic Imaging at Loretto Hospital. “Loretto Hospital is determined to ensure our community has the best preventative and routine care possible, regardless of insurance status.”

Loretto Hospital offers state-of-the-art breast tomosynthesis technology, which utilizes low-dose x-rays to produce a three-dimensional image of the breast tissue, thus helping radiologists detect cancer when it is most treatable. The 3D images can separate breast tissue that may appear overlapping in 2D imaging. This advanced imaging improves accuracy in detecting abnormalities, reducing the need for follow-up scans and unnecessary biopsies.

Free screening mammograms are available to residents of Austin in the 60651, 60644, 60624, 60623, and 60612 zip codes, as well as to residents of Berwyn (60402) and Cicero (60632 and 60804). Women outside these zip codes can take advantage of Loretto’s reduced rate, \$75 mammograms throughout the month of October. Certain restrictions apply. For additional information, call 773-854-5220.



Loretto Hospital located at 645 S Central Ave, Chicago, IL 60644

Shutdown from front page

support for Davis and Ford’s efforts.

Ford outlined his legislative accomplishments, including bills on drug addiction recovery, criminal record expungement, and driver’s license restoration. As chair of higher education appropriations, Ford said he has allocated \$3.2 billion annually to ensure access to public colleges and universities across Illinois. He pledged to protect Medicaid and support seniors if elected to Congress.

The meeting quickly turned to the shutdown’s immediate threats. Ford warned that if Congress fails to pass a budget by November 1st, SNAP benefits could expire, Medicaid subsidies could vanish, and programs like LIHEAP (energy assistance), public transportation funding, and early childhood education could face severe cuts. “This isn’t just politics,” Ford said. “It’s about whether people eat, stay warm, and get to the doctor.”

Tensions flared as community members voiced frustration with both political parties. One senior challenged Davis directly, criticizing claims that crime is down and expressing anger over food stamp reductions for longtime residents while immigrants receive aid. “We’re tired of the blame game,” the speaker said. “Stop fighting over Obamacare and start helping people.”

Another attendee asked about the impact of state and city leaders’ conflicts with President Trump on Illinois’ budget. Ford explained that without federal cooperation, the state would be forced to shoulder the full cost of programs like SNAP—potentially \$700 million annually.

Throughout the meeting, Davis and Ford emphasized the vulnerability of their district, which relies heavily on federal funding for hospitals, medical schools, and health centers. Davis framed the political divide as a clash of differing needs and interests, while Ford called for unity and compromise.

The gathering concluded with informal conversations, including a moment of recognition for Ms. Gibbons, the building’s president, and a brief exchange with Tanya, a mortician and autopsy technician who shared her perspective outside the meeting. Ford praised Davis’s accessibility, noting that residents feel comfortable calling him “Danny”—a sign, he said, of a true “people’s champion.”

As the shutdown drags on, West Side residents are left hoping that their voices will help push Washington toward resolution before vital lifelines are cut.

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~ Susan G. Komen®, “Breast Cancer Statistics | Susan G. Komen®”
Susan G. Komen®, 7 Aug. 2024, www.komen.org



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Blast from Recent Past Events

Faith, Healing, and Healthy Living: Community Gathers to Explore Life Beyond and Wellness on Earth

A recent gathering at the YMCA McCormick in Logan Square blended spiritual reflection, health advocacy, and community collaboration — all sparked by a powerful personal story of survival and purpose.

The event centered around a moving testimony of a near-death experience (NDE) shared by a best-selling author, Betty J. Eadie known for her book *Embraced by the Light*. Speaking to a captivated audience, she recounted the moment she “traveled through a tunnel of light” and encountered Jesus in a heavenly realm filled with gardens, waterfalls, and radiant peace.

“I saw the beauty of my soul reflected in the water,” she told listeners. “It wasn’t just a vision — it was the realization that every spirit carries divine beauty and purpose.”

The author described how, after her return to life, she battled depression and agoraphobia, struggling to adjust to everyday reality after witnessing such an extraordinary experience. Over time, she came to understand that her suffering was part of a divine mission — to write and share what she had learned.

“I was told before I came back that my mission would be a book,” she explained. “I was shown its title and cover before I ever wrote a word.”

Her story inspired several follow-up projects, including a revised edition of *Embraced by the Light* and a new volume titled *Revisiting Embraced by the Light*, which aims to include previously untold experiences and spiritual insights.

Faith Meets Health: Plant-Based Living

See **Healthy** back page



(l-r) Sandra Brinson, son Chef Clarence Brinson Jr, and Professor Clarence Brinson Sr sponsored a Faith, Healing, and Healthy Living event McCormick YMCA in Logan square

National Guard Troops in Washington

By Professor Zaki Amir

The Safe and Beautiful Task Force enacted by the Trump administration to make the streets in the national capital safe again activated 800 National Guard troops to patrol the streets of Washington, D.C. on August 11th, 2025.

And from its beginning, it has been controversial not only for the District of Columbia, but has sent shockwaves through the rest of the country and at 88 years of age, D.C.’s delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton, the oldest member of Congress said on September 3rd “He deployed more than 2,000 National Guard troops, put guns in their hands, and sent masked ICE officers to forcibly take community members from our streets.”

She continued with, “President Trump has used D.C. residents as props in a political play to showcase his own power, adding, while the president claims that federal control of DC is necessary to combat crime, his own actions severely jeopardize public safety in the District.”

Concluding her remarks, she stated, “No emergency exists in D.C that the president did not create himself.” As the district’s representative, she’s introduced different bills to combat the possibility of federal troops overreaching their authority as they are deployed in the nation’s capitol as peacekeepers.

Representative Norton has introduced one bill calling for those armed soldiers to wear body cameras like MPD. As of September 10, 2025 there are 2,300 National Guard troops in D.C and social media posts are categorizing their placement as 2 percent positive and 53% negative with 45 % neutral in their assessment of need for their presence.

Crime Statistics for Washington, D.C. are down as the chart below indicates:

There was a moderate decrease in reported crimes during the week of August 12-18, after President Donald Trump signed an executive order taking control of DC’s police department, compared to the prior week of August 5-11.

Under an Executive Order it is legitimized, but the question is if it is the right thing to do. The consensus of Afrodescendant Washingtonians is for the federalized troops to go to the trouble spots

like wards 2, 7 and 8 which are not safe in their own words.

However, their occupation has resulted in one soldier credited with helping an overdosed victim survive by giving them Narcan and the troops “beautifying” the city by laying mulch and picking up trash.

“Instead of troops to combat crime, there should be more federal money spent to have programs for young people to participate in which would incentivize them not to commit crimes and prepare them for more productive roles in society,” was the comment of one D.C. resident who wished to remain anonymous.

On August 26th, the national president of Black Lawyers for Justice Malik Shabazz held a press conference shoring up support for D.C. residents at MPD headquarters to speak to the “illegal activities” by the National Guard and the unfair targeting of Afrodescendants.

In the conference Attorney Shabazz stated, “We will sue each of these rogue officers... a class action lawsuit is likely.”

Black Lawyers for Justice allege National Guard, MPD violated constitutional rights

Mayor Muriel Bowser held a press conference September 8th sharing her position on her city’s occupation by federal troops and its effects on her constituents in light of a Howard University student being arrested with these words, “Well, my message is the same to everybody, students alike. We want everybody to follow the rules and follow the law, and we want to make sure we have a safe city. We don’t want to be overtaken by anybody from the outside, but people should be following the law.

‘I Don’t Know What You Mean’: Muriel Bowser Grilled By Reporters For Playing Along With Trump’s D.C. Takeover During Press Conference | Watch

September 11th ends the Trump administration’s order for federal takeover of the city’s police department but does not necessarily mean the deployment of troops has ended or the troops will depart from their mission.

It was August 11th which brought the executive order declaring a crime emergency enabling the use of federal Home rule Act of 1973 allowing his administration to place



Federal Troops deployed in Washington DC

the troops in the capitol.

House Speaker Mike Johnson has said he won’t work to extend the deadline and Mayor Bowser reiterated this fact, “the MPD is not compelled to give MPD services, as directed by the president. That’s what changes.”

Mayor Muriel Bowser herself issued an executive order on September 2nd which requires local district officials to coordinate with federal law enforcement agencies, “to the maximum extent allowable by law within,” as it applies to U. S. Marshalls, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the U.S. Park Police. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers are not included on the list and there is no expiration on her order.

Crimes reported to DC’s Metropolitan Police Department

Crimes Reported

Week of August 5-11, 2025

Week of August 12-18, 2025

Assault with a dangerous weapon

14

16

Burglary

16

17

Homicide

2

1

Motor vehicle theft

83

65

Robbery

25

14

Theft from auto

139

71

Other theft

224

219

Note: Data as of Friday, August 22, 2025. Data is preliminary and can change over time. Not all crime is included in the public MPD database.

Building Wealth Today for Tomorrow: Treasurer Melissa Conyears-Ervin Hosted 5th Annual Financial Empowerment Event



City of Chicago Treasurer Melissa Conyears-Ervin (red dress center) honored 2025 Chicago Star Awards winners at her “Building Wealth Today for Tomorrow” event.

CHICAGO, IL — City Treasurer Melissa Conyears-Ervin continued her mission to help Chicagoans achieve economic stability through the “Building Wealth Today for Tomorrow” initiative, a free citywide financial empowerment event designed to educate, inspire, and equip residents with tools to build long-term wealth.

The event took place at the UIC Forum, 1213 S. Halsted St., Chicago, IL 60607, and was open to the public at no cost. Attendees registered online by visiting Chicago.gov/BWTT or by scanning the event’s QR code.

Participants had access to a wide range of financial workshops and services, including:

- Homeowners assistance programs to help residents maintain stability and equity.
- Money management sessions covering budgeting, saving, and debt reduction.
- Investment strategies to help families and individuals grow their wealth.
- Estate planning guidance to protect and pass on assets to future generations.
- AI skills training to prepare participants for opportunities in emerging technology.
- Complimentary professional headshots, empowering attendees to advance their careers.

City Treasurer Melissa Conyears-Ervin emphasized that building financial knowledge and confidence was key to creating stronger communities. “When we equip our communities with the tools to manage, invest, and grow their finances, we build a stronger Chicago—one family at a time,” said Conyears-Ervin.

The “Building Wealth Today for Tomorrow” program reflected the Treasurer’s ongoing commitment to promoting financial literacy, economic inclusion, and generational wealth for residents across the city.

NLCN was able to get an interview with the Chicago City Treasurer - Melissa Ervin after the event to answer a few questions.

NLCN: What were some of your goals for this year’s event,

Chicago City Treasurer - Melissa Ervin

Number one. We need to just bring exposure and awareness to financial empowerment, and I knew that once they got into the building that they would walk away with their lives changed. So when we talk about financial empowerment, we want to really get residents, especially those on the west

See BTTW page 6



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BTTW from page 5



ABC 7 Eyewitness News Anchors Val Warner, Grammy award winner Common, and City Treasurer, Melissa Conyears-Ervin at the 5th Annual BTTW event.

and south sides of Chicago in the mindset of home ownership, credit management, credit repair. We don't want to be afraid to pull our credit scores. We want to be able to take that on by the ham and. That we can make our lives better and different. But in addition to that, there's a lot of brilliant business owners in our communities, and we want to give them access to Capital. So those were the three major points that I wanted to bring home today, and I believe that with the celebrities that we have,

I brought celebrities, if you notice that were us. I didn't bring people that were above reach. I brought people that could relate to what we're dealing with that comes from what we came from, and they are able to really show us what it means to make it.

NLCN

We talked to Wilbert Cook, an attendee and a long time resident of the Westside, commented on Rapper, Actor Common how he was down to earth.

Chicago City Treasurer - Melissa Ervin

"And Common spoke a lot about how he learned things in life, but we had another guy on here that talked about how he came from being broke to a millionaire within 10 years. Those are stories that we need to hear because people can relate to that. So, this was our fifth annual event, and this was amazing, but I'm looking forward to getting bigger and bigger each year.

NLCN

And what's your Message to Westsiders because we noticed businesses like Duwell Fish Co. and other that are closed down, and we need more businesses on the Westside?

Chicago City Treasurer - Melissa Ervin
We have to support our small businesses. By the way, if you notice we have this Chicago Star Awards and we do that purposely to highlight small businesses, and we showcase them on our websites because we want residents to support them. If we don't support our small business owners, they won't make it.

The Chicago Star Award is an exciting initiative aimed at recognizing and uplifting small businesses that significantly contribute to the economic and social well-being of our vibrant city. Small businesses were nominated by going to the city treasurer's website and filling out the nomination form. Businesses for 2025 were selected and honored at the end of the event. Look for the list of 2024 honorees on the website. Keynote Speakers helped to Inspire Financial Growth and Purpose

This year's BWTT event featured Grammy and Academy Award-winning artist, actor, and activist Common, who joined Treasurer Conyears-Ervin for a fireside chat on purpose-driven success, leadership, and giving back to the community.

Also headlining the event was Peter Estevez, entrepreneur, author, and philanthropist, who delivered a keynote address encouraging attendees to embrace financial empowerment as a pathway to freedom and impact.

Panels Highlighted Leadership, Innovation, and Inclusion

A standout session, "Breaking Barriers: Women Leading On and Off the Court," spotlighted women shaping the future of sports and leadership. Panelists included:

- Renee Montgomery, Co-owner and Vice President of the WNBA's Atlanta Dream.
- Karen Leetow, President of the Chicago Stars FC.
- Shari Nycote, moderator from Essence.

They were joined by Rena Wakama, Linnae Harper, and Jessica Carrothers, who represented the next

generation of women in sports leadership.

Other featured speakers and panelists included:

- George Kamel, who led an interactive session on building healthy wealth conversations.
 - Damola Adamolekun, CEO of Red Lobster, discussing innovation and leadership in business.
 - Peter O., who shared insights on the collective spending power and influence of Black and Hispanic communities.
- Treasurer Melissa Conyears-Ervin underscored that Building Wealth Today for Tomorrow is about more than money—it's about empowering families and creating generational change.

"When we equip our communities with the tools to manage, invest, and grow their finances, we build a stronger Chicago—one family at a time," said Conyears-Ervin.

The event reflects the Treasurer's broader vision: bridging financial gaps, expanding opportunity, and ensuring that every Chicagoan—regardless of background—has the tools to thrive.

For more details visit Chicago.gov/BWTT.



BLACK FRIDAY

Tour Event

Fun Activities | Give-Aways | Refreshments

Stop by Montclare Supportive Living November 7th, 14th & 21st, 2025 for a tour of Montclare and enjoy some fun activities that is listed below.

Nov 7th-Senior Bingo -1pm-3pm

Nov 14th- Sip-N-Paint- 1pm-3pm

Nov 21st -Friendsgiving Pie Social (Bring a friend) 1pm-3pm

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NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN by the West Side Expanded Mental Health Services Program Commission that a public hearing will be held on the proposed annual budget and appropriation ordinance for the West Side Expanded Mental Health Services Program on November 17, 2025 at 7:30 pm at The Inspire Business Center, 1016 W. Jackson Blvd., Chicago, IL 60607.

Governing Commission of the West Side Expanded Mental Health Services Program.

By: Zashandra Wright, Chairperson

Ronald E. Damper, West Side Business Leader, Honored with Street Renaming

On Chicago's west side, a ribbon was cut and a new street sign was unveiled in honor of one of the city's significant minority-owned industrial success stories. The street in front of the headquarters of Damron Corporation — the Chicago-based tea manufacturer known for supplying to national clients, like McDonald's, has been officially renamed "Damron Way."

A Legacy of Innovation and Opportunity

Founded by in the 1980s, Damron Corporation began as a tea-processing business on the city's west side. KC Alumni+2mfgren.org+2 Under his leadership, the company became the first African-American owned company to become a national supplier to McDonald's — a hallmark of achievement in Chicago's manufacturing and supplier diversity landscape.

Located at 4433 W. Ohio Street, the company operates out of a 50,000-square-foot facility that employs dozens of workers from the surrounding community.

"Damron Way" — A Street Renamed for Impact

The renaming of the street marks more than just a symbolic gesture — it's a nod to decades of contribution to the local economy, jobs, and community development. Local officials, company employees, and community stakeholders gathered to mark the unveiling of the new sign.

At the ceremony, Damper reflected on the milestone:

"This isn't just our achievement — it belongs to the community, the employees, and everyone who believed in building opportunity

right here on the west side," he said.

Building More Than Tea

Beyond manufacturing tea, Damron's mission has always included job creation and equity. The company partners with training organizations and emphasizes young people entering manufacturing and packaging. mfgren.org Damper has spoken about how he marched for civil rights in his youth and how that legacy influenced his business philosophy of giving back. BOSA - Black Owned Supplier Association

Why It Matters for the West Side

- Local jobs. In an area often challenged by disinvestment, a stable manufacturing employer sends a strong message of opportunity.

- Supplier diversity. Damron's milestone with McDonald's opened doors for other minority-owned firms in national supply chains.

- Symbolic recognition. The street renaming affirms that manufacturing and minority entrepreneurship are valued pieces of Chicago's economic fabric.

What's Next

With the street now bearing its name, many see this as a new chapter for Damron Corporation. The company is expanding its packaging and logistics divisions and exploring further growth that keeps its base in the neighborhood it has served for years. mfgren.org

A Word for the Community

For residents of the west side, the story of Damron and Ronald Damper is a reminder: transformation happens when local businesses invest in people, place, and purpose. And when a street can be renamed in honor of a community institution, it signals recognition of that impact.



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Ronald E. Damper's (3rd from sign on pole) company Damron was honored with a street sign named after the company. (Insert: Street Sign)



Cong Danny Davis, State Rep LaShawn Ford, and Ald. Jason Ervin joined Ronald Damper, which founded in the unveiling of the renaming of the street where the company is located. included are the staff of Damron Corporation, and other supporters

EXODUS DRUM & BUGLE CORPS. PRESENTS

SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

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Jerome-773-997-5200 / Tee-312-244-3784

Together,
We can make a difference!



Healthy from page 4



Vegan wrap and sides prepared by Chef Clarence Brinson

Takes the Stage

The spiritual conversation evolved naturally into a practical discussion about living well on Earth — especially through healthy eating.

Professor Benson, one of the evening's key speakers, and key coordinator, emphasized the moral and physical benefits of plant-based nutrition, citing scientific studies and spiritual principles. "A plant-based lifestyle doesn't just improve health," he said. "It aligns with compassion, stewardship, and respect for all life."

Attendees shared their own experiences with vegetarian and vegan living, while others expressed curiosity about how to make healthier eating more affordable and accessible for families on the West Side.

Plans emerged to host free "Health and Wellness Seminars" at local churches, combining nutrition education with plant-based meal tastings. Professor Brinson, his wife Sandra, and their son Clarence Brinson Jr. who is a plant-based chef, proposed partnering with vegan medical professionals to explain the science behind plant-based diets and their connection to disease prevention



Diane Alexander, Exotic Dancer

and longevity.

"We can bring doctors, nutritionists, and everyday people together in the same room," said one organizer. "This is how real change starts — with education and shared meals."

Community Collaboration in Action

The meeting concluded with a spirit of collaboration. Several participants agreed to form a working group to organize church-based health and wellness events, with an initial focus on the South Shore and East 77th Street areas.

Action items include securing church venues, contacting vegan food partners, recruiting medical experts, and working with local media for coverage and outreach. Organizers also discussed affordable commitment models — such as \$1-a-day support or monthly meal programs — to sustain the initiative.

"If everyone gives just a little, we can fund ongoing programs that nourish both body and soul," said one community leader.



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