



LEFT: ANC Commissioner Darrell Gaston, 22, believes that DCPS “needs to be open to change.” Photo by Khadijah Ali-Coleman.
 RIGHT: Miss Teen DC 2009, Jessica Nowlin, was an attendee of the Levelten Town Hall Meeting on Dec. 17. Photo by Khadijah Ali-Coleman



Barry Proposes New Efforts to Curb School Suspensions

The Community Weighs In

BY KHADIJAH ALI-COLEMAN

At a public roundtable on Dec. 8, Ward 8 Councilmember Marion Barry introduced a bill, the Suspension Reform Act, developed with Ward 5 Councilmember Harry “Tommy” Thomas Jr. in response to Barry’s findings upon investigating suspension policy and actions at Hart Middle School located on Mississippi Avenue SE. A summary of the bill calls for the establishment of uniform standards for suspension for each public and charter school in DC. The bill, if passed, would require DCPS Chancellor Michelle Rhee to adopt a standard for suspension which Barry and Thomas have outlined in the bill.

Some of the standards outlined include:

- Immediate suspension shall be authorized in cases where a student’s behavior poses a substantial threat of bodily harm to himself or others, and the parent, legal guardian or other responsible adult shall be notified by telephone and ordered to pick the student up from school, or the appropriate District agency may take the student into custody;
- If the parent, legal guardian or other responsible adult cannot be reached, the student shall be held at school until the end of the day, and the parent, legal guardian or other responsible adult shall be notified orally by telephone and in writing of the reason for the suspension, the educational services that have been put into place for the student and a designated time and place for a conference; and
- In such case, a conference shall be held within the first 48 hours of the suspension to determine whether the suspension should stand or whether alternative disciplinary actions should be taken against the student.

Local residents and the online community of bloggers who have been following Hart Middle School’s recent turmoil involving a terminated principal and an upswing in violence, have differing opinions regarding the proposed bill. Barry asserts that the bill was created based on his visit to Hart at the beginning of the 2008–2009 school year. On visit, he spoke with one of the three assistant principals there and learned that approximately 70 students had been suspended in the month of September alone, and in some of the cases, parents had not been notified immediately at the time of suspension.

One popular blogger, a Michelle Rhee supporter, known online as DC Teacher

Chic (<http://dteacherchic.blogspot.com/>) believes that parental consent is a non-issue. Outraged at the introduction of the new bill, she dismisses the assumptions made that current suspension rates are based on frivolous reasons.

“At Nalle, where I taught, and where things were out of control,” DC Teacher Chic writes, “kids were not suspended for trivial offenses. They were suspended for cussing out the principal, getting in fights that required multiple adults to break up, destruction of school property, etc. I’m sure it is similar at Hart. If kids were suspended for minor offenses, you’d have half the kids gone.” ★

Hill East Waterfront Visions

Medical Facilities among Proposed Plans

BY VIRGINIA AVNIEL SPATZ

In December, community members heard presentations from four potential master developers for the 67-acre “Hill East Waterfront” site – just west of the Potomac River, from the Stadium-Armory Metro stop to the DC Jail. Plans will include office, retail, residences and community space; in addition, each proposal must include at least two acres dedicated to medical services. Groundbreaking for the first of three phases of building is expected in 2011.

HDG Waterfront Development, with a team including EYA and William C. Smith, proposes a “Zero Carbon, Zero Waste community” and stresses “four philosophies: live, work, play and sustain” in their design. They propose collaborating with DC Primary Care Association to create an 80,000 square foot medical facility.

Hill East Waterfront LLC – a team which includes Banneker Ventures and Donatelli (of Minnesota-Benning Phase II) and Banneker Ventures – offers a plan they say will be “sustainable for people, not just buildings” through job creation and business development. Their plan calls for 327,660 square feet in unspecified medical facilities.

New Hill East JV – a venture joining Urban Atlantic with Blue Sky and others – aims for a “community that is inclusive and connected and caring,” where neighbors can “live, work and socialize in one area.” Dynamis Advisors, their medical partner, plans to meld housing and retail with primary and urgent care – across 325,500 square feet – using a “revolutionary model that has transformed other cities.”

East Banc offered “A Different Approach for a Different Economy,” dividing Hill East Waterfront into 60–80 separate pads, which would be sold over time to different developers – possibly incorporating “the best of others [competing for the award].” Vice President Joe Sternlieb said economic times are so uncertain

that no one today can tell which health care providers will remain in business a few years down the road; their medical plans are “to be determined.”

The public comment period continues through Jan. 22 with a final selection in February. Deputy Mayor Neil Albert says his office is seeking “input of people who will be affected most” and encourages “direct and creative” comments.

Community members are asked to visit www.hilleastwaterfrontdc.com or submit comments through an ANC commissioner. The deputy mayor’s office said materials from the Dec. 11 presentations would be available on-line the following week and that a link would be established for public comment. Contact Genevieve Hanson in the deputy mayor’s office, 202-727-6365, if these updates do not appear (they had not been posted at press time). Additional proposal details are available in January’s Hill Rag. ★

Challenges Teens Face

LevelTen Forum Addresses Achievement Gap in DC Public Schools

BY KHADIJAH ALI-COLEMAN

The nonprofit organization LevelTen held a town hall meeting on Dec. 17 at Covenant House Washington’s Nancy Dickerson Whitehead Service Center titled The Crisis: Challenges Teen Face. The LevelTen Town Hall was a forum of discussion that addressed the achievement gap and its impact on student school retention rates and later life success.

Panelists, who also served as facilitators for small break-out groups, included recently elected ANC Commissioner Darrell Gaston, who recently ran against Marion Barry for the Ward 8 Councilmember seat, Latosha Frink, a local youth mentor and business woman and Diallo Sumbry, a local youth development specialist and founder of the Andinkra Group which manages the Beat Ya Feet Kings.

“The planners of the event were firm in our plan to have a group of panelists and attendees that represented various parts of the community,” said Daphne Charles, LevelTen’s director of community mobilization.

Opening with a spoken word piece by poet Jonathan Tucker, the meeting was nontraditional in its format. After introducing themselves, panelists joined tables and initiated conversations regarding the state of DCPS, the achievement gap’s prevalence in DC and the role parents play in student success. Among the list of risk factors participants believe contribute to the achievement gap of DCPS students included a lack of an educational standard within most homes, low expectations from parents and educators and stereotyping of students.

“Expectations come from parents,” said one participant. “That’s the foundation of a child’s learning.”

Responses from participants that include solutions and ways to mobilize the community have been compiled and will be displayed on the LevelTen website later in 2009.

For information on upcoming town hall meetings, contact Daphne L. Charles at 202-492-6592 or dcharles@level-ten.org. Visit www.level-ten.org or www.closestbeachievementgap.org for more information. ★

DC Primary Care Association Unveils Plans to Boost Healthcare Quality for All

BY KHADIJAH ALI-COLEMAN

The District of Columbia Primary Care Association (DCPCA) was awarded a \$29.8 million grant for their Medical Homes DC Project, which includes expansion efforts for projects serving the health needs of low-income and uninsured DC residents. To rebuild DC’s primary care system for an estimated 210,000 low-income residents who live in areas of DC that lack sufficient medical services, Medical Homes DC will invest an estimated \$145 million in capital needs, quality improvements and administrative services over 10 years.

“We want to make sure that everyone has the same access to primary care, regardless of income or where they live,” said Sharon Baskerville, the chief executive of DCPCA. “Why do we have to tolerate people using emergency rooms as their primary care physicians instead of having quality health care for all DC residents?”

On Dec. 12, DCPCA unveiled the completion of the expansion and renovation of Family and Medical Counseling Service Inc. (FMCS), located at 2041 MLK Ave. SE, as one of the early successes of the DCPCA Medical Homes DC Capital Projects. Those present were taken on a tour of the newly renovated facility and given a virtual orientation to the DCPCA electronic health records system. Fashioned similar to the electronic system of medical providers like Kaiser Permanente, the DCPCA electronic health records system allows DCPCA providers to transfer patient info for immediate access that is not dependent on faxing, mailing or other hard copy forms that may delay immediate health attention.

By the completion of all of the renovations and implementation of the electronic health records system, Baskerville hopes that the services available to low-income DC residents will be comparable to what insured patients receive.

“I want people with insurance, who can pay and afford health care, to want to walk in and receive services at these sites. All public money should be distributed this way, so there is no ‘ghettoization’ of what kind of care you get,” she said.

For more information on Medical Homes DC, go to www.dcpca.org. ★



LEFT: “We want to make sure that everyone has the same access to primary care, regardless of income or where they live,” said Sharon Baskerville, the chief executive of DCPCA, at the facility tour on Dec. 12. Photo by Khadijah Ali-Coleman.

RIGHT: The DCPA Electronic Health Records system allows DCPA providers to transfer patient info for immediate access with just the click of the computer mouse.

Minnesota Avenue Community Showcase

Sign of the Times, Partners Mount Collaborative Exhibit

BY VIRGINIA AVNIEL SPATZ AND KRISTINA GREGGS

The “Minnesota Avenue Community Showcase” displayed its fifth exhibit in late November through a collaboration between a local McDonald’s franchise, River Terrace Elementary School and the nonprofit Sign of the Times cultural workshops and gallery. Showcase artists were students in Ms. Coles’ fifth-grade class at River Terrace: Henry Brown, Cyre Collins, Destiny Cotton, Lynshawn Ebron, Shavonne Fraley, Emoni Price and Demony Smith.

Present at the Nov. 21 unveiling – held at the McDonald’s at Minnesota Avenue and Dix Street NE – were River Terrace principal Shannon Foster, art teacher Irby Vinson, parents, friends and community members. McDonald’s rewarded artists with “Happy Meals,” while certificates were presented by James Greggs, founder and director of Sign of the Times.

“We really owe the great success of the showcase to our talented young artists and to Mr. Carlos Matoes, owner of this McDonald’s,” said Greggs. “This partnership has done so much in allowing us to help, support and encourage the youth in our community.” Matoes has also worked to highlight historical figures from the community, Greggs said, displaying Library of Congress photographs of Nannie Helen Burroughs and the National Training School for Women and Girls, which she founded in 1909.

Sign of the Times, now in its 38th year, serves children, youth and seniors of Ward 7 by offering affordable in- and after-school cultural arts workshops. The organization is best known for its murals found throughout the community, including “East River” located in the East River Park Shopping Center at Benning Road and Minnesota Avenue NE.

Greggs notes that Sign of the Times’ programs are often “the only exposure to art for many individuals.” He reports, however, that reduced contributions, resulting from today’s “difficult economic times ... directly and severely affect our ability to offer much needed arts programs and training to youth and other residents of our community.”

To learn more or support Sign of the Times, visit www.signofthetimes.org or contact Gloria Brown, Sign of the Times Art Center, PO Box 64445, Washington, DC 20029-3000. ★

Stooping to Serve

Wizards Treat Area Seniors to Holiday Cheer

BY VIRGINIA AVNIEL SPATZ

Ward 7 seniors were among those feted on Dec. 4 as part of the Washington Wizards annual “12 days of holiday cheer.” For the second year, a group organized by Dorothy Douglas, then chair of ANC 7D, joined together for a luxury bus ride from the Big Chair Chess Club to the Verizon Center’s Acela Club. At the Acela Club, seniors from around the city were treated to a festive meal, live holiday jazz and an opportunity to mingle with members of the Wizards team.



STOOPING TO SERVE --->
CLOCKWISE: Ward 7 seniors at the Acela Club on Dec. 4. Wizards’ Ed Tapscott consults with Sandra Buckholter and companions. Rookie Center JaVale McGee and Ward 7’s Rev. Edward Harris.

Some in the Ward 7 crowd were especially eager to talk with interim head coach Ed Tapscott, who had been in his new job only 10 days after moving up from director of player development following Eddie Jordan’s dismissal on Nov. 24.

“I told [Tapscott] I was shocked when they fired Eddie Jordan,” said Rita Pendleton, a 30-year-resident of Ward 7 and longtime Wizards fan. “He said Eddie Jordan was a friend, but that he hoped to improve the team’s record now that he was in the job. ... We’ll see.”

Even those not particularly hooked on basketball enjoyed the food, conversation and ambience, including service by the Wizards. Tapscott, assistant coach Phil Hubbard, President Ernie Grunfeld and rookie center JaVale McGee supplemented the wait staff, delivering meals and chatting with guests.

Many, like the Reverend Edward Harris, were tickled by the contrast between 7-foot-tall McGee and the substantially shorter crowd Abe and Irene Pollin were hosting. But another contrast was also evident, as the 20-year-old, just starting his career, shook hands with guests representing decades of experience in their fields: The Ward 7 contingent alone included ministers, church mothers and other congregational leaders; ANC commissioners and neighborhood leaders; a former vice president of the Washington Saturday College, now in reorganization; a student exploring spirituality at the Tai Sophia Institute; individuals with decades of experience in government, business, industry and education and continuing interests to pursue.

The few not-yet-seniors invited to join the festivities were delighted to see the young McGee and other Wizards bending to serve and greet community elders. After all, said Sasha Jones of the Wizards organization, “seniors mean a lot to the community.” ★