



News >> Page 3
**Talkin' Tacos Heats Up
Pompano Beach
with New Location**

A STANDING OVATION FOR THE FUTURE:

BLANCHE ELY HIGH SCHOOL CELEBRATES THE CLASS OF 2025

By Attiyya Atkins

Class of 2025, what a time to be alive.

ON Thursday, May 29 at the Broward Center of the Performing Arts, Principal of Blanche Ely High School, Tavures Williams, sang a remixed version of Rod Wave's popular hit "25."

The moment signified a huge milestone for nearly 440 students in Blanche Ely High School's Class of 2025.

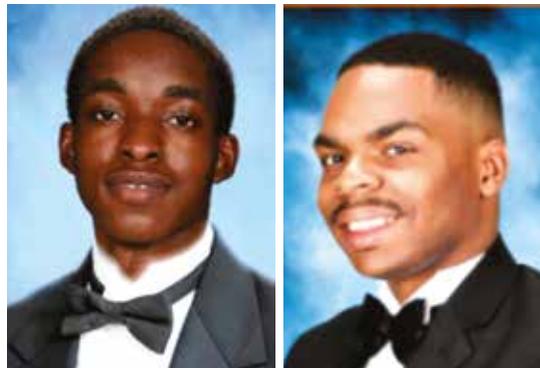
Held at the Broward Center

for the Performing Arts, the graduation ceremony was more than a rite of passage—it was a celebration of achievement, resilience, and promise. With family, faculty, and friends cheering from every seat, the evening delivered inspiration, recognition, and Black excellence in full bloom.

Valedictorian Kelan Denis delivered a speech that brought the house down and Salutatorian Guiliano Jules.

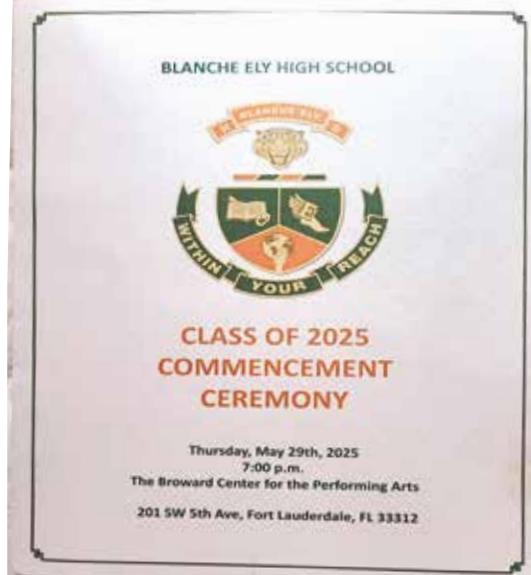
Also recognized during the ceremony was teacher Connie McGirt, a standout educator in

■ *The Future, see page 11*

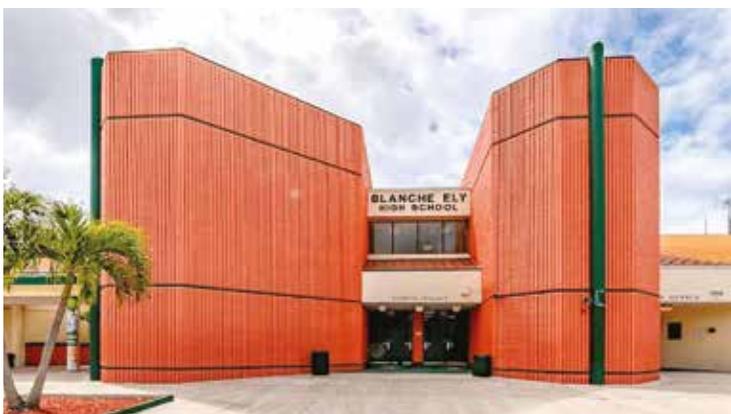


Blanche Ely Salutatorian:
Guiliano Jules

Blanche Ely Valedictorian:
Kelan Denni



Blanche Ely High School Commencement Paper



Round Table Discussions for New Downtown and E. Pat Larkins Community Center

By Kristen Hernandez

Pompano Beach, FL – What's going on with the E. Pat Larkins building? After years of planning and months of discussion, the northwest community still doesn't know.

Will it be torn down? Will it be repurposed? But most of all, will it continue to be a community cornerstone for the residents of the northwest community.

Throughout the month of March, the City of Pompano Beach, the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA), and

■ *Round Table, see page 11*



Members of Eta Nu chapter of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. (Que) celebrate the grand opening of the new TechRec Center at Mitchell Moore Park.

Mitchell Moore Park Unveils New TechRec Gaming Center and Upgraded Courts

By Villij News Staff

Pompano Beach, FL - For generations, Mitchell Moore Park has been more than just a park. It's a pulse point in Northwest Pompano Beach—a home base for city programs, beloved summer camps, and the pride of the Pompano Chiefs football and

■ *Mitchell Moore, see page 11*

One Year Later, Northwest Proposal to Preserve Black History in New Downtown Falls on Deaf Ears

By Kristen Hernandez
Villij News Writer

Pompano Beach, FL – One year ago, Beverly Perkins, demanded the Northwest community have a say in the city's \$2 billion downtown development. Her asks- job training programs, tenant relocation, hiring local consultants, and honoring the area's rich Black history.

Three-hundred and sixty-five days later, not one ask has been honored – not one ask has been acknowledged.

■ *Preserve Black, see page 9*

CIRCLE OF BROTHERHOOD
BROWARD: POMPANO CHAPTER

Gun Violence Awareness Community

Prayer Breakfast

Saturday, June 21th
8am 10am



**CIRCLE OF
BROTHERHOOD**

Call (954) 391.3553

Text 754.265.8511

BLACK MEN SOLVING THEIR OWN
COMMUNITY PROBLEMS

Antioch Missionary Baptist Church

420 NW 8th Ave,

Pompano Beach, FL 33060

Talkin' Tacos Heats Up Pompano Beach with New Location

Mexican Concept to Host Grand Opening with First 100 Guests Receiving Free Tacos

POMPANO BEACH, Fla. (June 3, 2025) – Talkin' Tacos, a food truck turned fast-casual Mexican eatery serving scratch-made, innovative, and Instagram-worthy dishes, will open their fourth Broward County restaurant in Pompano Beach located at 431 S Federal Hwy. on Friday, June 13. To celebrate, the restaurant will host a grand opening party starting at 6 p.m. on opening day, with the first 100 guests receiving a free order of the concept's signature Birria Tacos, Jarritos and swag.

GUESTS can also enjoy live entertainment including photo opportunities with an LED Robot. The restaurant would also like to thank all area first responders for everything they do and offer a free meal from June 16-19.

The new 1,750 sq. foot restaurant will provide authentic Halal Mexican cuisine and feature indoor seating for 50 guests and outdoor seating for 32 guests. The innovative chef-driven menu will offer guest favorites including Birria Tacos, Mahi Mahi Burrito, Birria Ramen and Street Corn in a Cup. A signature feature of the menu is the beef birria which is braised each day for 12 hours before completing the cooking process. Guests can also indulge in desserts like loaded Churros and Tajin & Chamoy gummies and sip on homemade specialty beverages such as lemonades,



horchatas and mangonadas.

"We're excited to expand our presence into Pompano Beach and share our love for authentic, bold Mexican flavors with this amazing community," said Mohammad Farraj, co-founder of Talkin' Tacos. "This new location is a reflection of our commitment to innovation and



quality, and we can't wait to celebrate this milestone with our guests and continue growing together in South Florida."

The restaurant's radiant atmosphere features hand painted murals and neon signs providing an upbeat yet laid back vibe. Technology features include self-serve kiosks where guests

can place their orders efficiently, eliminating the cashier's position and allowing faster speed-of-service.

Talkin' Tacos, which stormed onto the scene in 2020, was born from the fiery passion for authentic flavors. It began its journey as a humble food truck in the vibrant streets of Miami. Since then, they've been spicing up taste buds across Florida, up the east coast and in Texas. The brand has grown tremendously in only five years, with 26 locations including Washington DC, NYC, Atlanta, Dallas, Charlotte and 20 restaurants in Florida. The brand also has nine confirmed locations throughout Florida for 2025.

Talkin' Tacos Pompano Beach will be open Monday - Sunday 11 a.m. - 10 p.m. For more information or to view the menu, visit talkintacos.net, and for crave-worthy dishes follow on Instagram @talkintacos.

BETTER TOGETHER LAUNCHES CALL CENTER FOR BROWARD COUNTY RESIDENTS

HISTORIC PARTNERSHIP ENHANCES ACCESS TO CARE

FORT LAUDERDALE AND HOLLYWOOD, FLORIDA – Broward Health and Memorial Healthcare System are proud to announce a significant milestone in their Better Together collaboration: the launch of a dedicated call center that connects residents to nearby healthcare services across Broward County.

"Better Together has gained significant momentum as the initiative's governance committee has convened every month to focus on existing needs related to primary care, maternal health and food insecurity," said Shane Strum, President & CEO of Broward Health and Interim CEO of Memorial Healthcare System. "The committee, comprised of leaders from Broward Health, Memorial Healthcare System and other community organizations, is identifying bar-

riers people are facing to access these resources and innovative ways we can meet their needs."

Residents can now call 844-711-0794 and a representative will link them to primary or maternity care services, such as brick-and-mortar physician offices or mobile health units, in convenient and easily accessible locations.

"This call center is more than just a phone number; it's a lifeline for families who have struggled to navigate the complexity of healthcare," said Melida Akiti, corporate transformation executive at Broward Health. "By listening to our community and working collaboratively with partners across the county, we're removing barriers and bringing care directly to those who need it most."

Working together, Broward Health and Memorial Health-

care System are addressing the most urgent healthcare challenges impacting our community, which will ultimately lead to improved outcomes, including:

- Fewer patients presenting at Emergency Departments because of a lack of primary care physician.
- Fewer Broward County residents with uncontrolled hypertension and diabetes.
- More mothers receiving prenatal care in their first trimester of pregnancy.
- Fewer babies born with low birth weights.
- More people connected to food resources or assistance programs.
- Fewer households facing meal deficits.

"Access to nutritious food is foundational to good health," said Paco Vélez, president and CEO of Feeding South Flori-

da. "We're building a network of support that recognizes food insecurity as a key social determinant of health, ensuring families across Broward County can access the resources they need to thrive."

Another exciting development is Better Together's new agreement with the University of Florida to capture detailed block-level data across Broward County. By gathering data at the city block level, rather than by zip code, we're gaining a more precise and nuanced view of who lives in our community. This advanced analysis will guide the governance committee in making data-driven decisions regarding where to direct resources.

This pioneering initiative is already gaining national attention. America's Essential Hospitals, the nation's leading advocate for people facing barriers to

healthcare access, recently visited the two healthcare systems in hopes of replicating this unique delivery model at other safety-net hospitals across the country. We are proud to serve as an example of how to utilize forward-thinking methods to bring care to the people most in need.

"We're proud to be part of this powerful coalition of community leaders who are coming together with purpose and urgency," said Loreen Chant, president and CEO of the Health Foundation of South Florida. "By aligning efforts and resources across organizations like Memorial Healthcare System and Broward Health, we're not only identifying critical gaps in care, but we're also working to close them."

For more information about Better Together, visit BrowardHealth.org/BetterTogether or MHS.net/BetterTogether.

More Art Broward Art Guild

By David Miller

This program encourages and supports creativity and art education throughout Broward County by providing opportunities for local artists to exhibit a body of their work in their local communities, and for those in our communities to view and purchase Fine Art by Broward Art Guild (BAG) member artists. We display in art spaces made available by local businesses, and libraries. All art is for sale and helps support the Broward Art Guild, and the artists. This is just another great way for our local artists to get exposure and for the community to enjoy MORE ART! Browse our photo galleries on Facebook to see some Art Around Town Exhibits, past and present. At this time, many of our venues are libraries. Why show your artwork at a Broward County Library Branch location? Well, according to their website: “The award-winning Broward County Libraries Division, founded in 1974, is the largest library system in Florida by square footage and one of the busiest, with more than 9 million walk-in customers visiting its 40 locations annually. The library has more than 3.4 million items and 2,000 computers for public use, and offers hundreds of events and programs to meet the needs of Broward County’s diverse community. Customers may also follow Libraries on Facebook and Twitter and since we post photos of our Art Around Town displays online and tag the Libraries pages, we are able to garner additional exposure for our artists. Who can participate? ALL Current Broward Art Guild Members. Is there a cost to participate? Not at this time; however the program is expanding rapidly and administrative costs are piling up so a nominal fee for participation will probably have to be instituted soon. It is our goal that these exhibit opportunities continue to be provided as a low-cost benefit to our membership. How do you get on the list to be considered for an exhibit? Simply fill out the online application. Someone from BAG will reach out to you to discuss opportunities once your information is reviewed and openings arise.

To submit your opinion piece to Villij News’ “As I See It” section, email ads@villijnews.com or write a letter to 5200 NW 33rd Ave, Suite 200, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33309.



Principal Karen-Duann Nesbit-Bennett with the dedicated staff of Sanders Park Elementary School.

New Leadership at Sanders Park Elementary

A leadership transition is underway at Sanders Park Elementary as the school prepares to welcome new principal Ms. Kizzy Dailey for the 2025–26 school year.

MS. **KAR-EN-DAUNN** Nesbeth-Bennett, who has led with compassion, consistency, and community care, is being recommended for a new leadership opportunity within Broward County Public Schools, according to memo dated May 27.

“We thank Ms. Nesbeth for her year of service to the Sanders Park Elementary school community and wish her well in her new endeavors,” the memo said.

During her time as principal, Ms. Nesbeth-Bennett championed a number of impactful programs, including Black History Month celebrations, “Dads Take Your Kids to School Day,” “Walk Your Kids to School Day,” student award ceremonies, and more. Every morning, she made it a point to personally greet families, opening each car door at parent drop-off with a smile — a small gesture that reflected her big heart.



Commissioner Beverly Perkins joins Principal Karen-Duann Nesbit-Bennett at Sanders Park Elementary.

Her presence and leadership will be deeply missed by the Sanders Park Elementary family, and the community extends its heartfelt thanks for her unwavering dedication to students and families.

Stepping into the role is Ms. Kizzy Dailey, who has already served the school as assistant principal. With 21 years of experience in Broward County Pub-

lic Schools — including the last eight years in assistant principal roles — Ms. Dailey brings deep familiarity with the school and a steadfast commitment to academic excellence and community engagement. Superintendent Dr. Howard Hepburn formally recommended her appointment at the June 17, 2025, Regular School Board Meeting. Dailey will begin her new role on July 1.

VillijNEWS
BROWARD COUNTY NEWS
VILLIJNEWS.COM

Publisher : A+ Editing & Content Creation

Editor-in-Chief : Attiyya Atkins

Distribution : Atkins United Moving

☎ 954-543-1423

✉ Villijnews@gmail.com

WHO'S GOT OUR BACK?

Pompano Beach Questions the Cost of Policing by BSO

By Villij News Staff

POMPANO BEACH, FL — For 25 years, the Broward Sheriff's Office (BSO) has been the face of law enforcement in Pompano Beach. But with rising costs and deteriorating facilities, city leaders are rethinking the partnership — and wondering aloud whether it's time to bring policing back home.

THE conversation hit a public nerve this week when city commissioners took a hard look at what Pompano is paying for public safety — and what it's actually getting in return.

"We're talking about millions of dollars every year, and we don't even have our own police department," said Commissioner Beverly Perkins. "We had one before. And the streets felt safer then."

Currently, Pompano Beach shells out more than \$63 million annually for policing through BSO — a figure that could jump to \$72 million by 2026

if no changes are made. These ballooning costs, along with aging infrastructure like the Bragg-Cristwell substation — which one commissioner said "leaks when it rains" — have pushed some city officials to ask: is this still working for us?

Mayor Rex Hardin acknowledged BSO's performance but didn't shy away from the cost concerns. "They've served us well," he said, "but we owe it to residents to see what else is possible."

One of those possibilities? Bringing back a Pompano Beach Police Department.

City staff have commissioned

a full feasibility study, expected to lay out everything from startup costs to long-term operations. The report will compare current BSO expenses against what it would take to stand up a new, independent police force — including buildings, training, equipment, and personnel.

But walking away from BSO wouldn't be without risk.

Pembroke Park recently cut ties with BSO after more than four decades — only to discover it was more expensive than anticipated. That case is now part of the larger cautionary tale Pompano leaders are studying closely.

On Thursday, the city commission will receive its first round of consultant reports outlining the transition options. No decisions have been made, but the debate is likely to heat up in the weeks ahead — especially as residents weigh in on what public safety should look like in the heart of the 954.

For some, the question is about cost. For others, it's about control.

"We can't put a price tag on peace of mind," said Commissioner Perkins. "But we can be honest about what we're getting for our money — and who's really protecting our people."

"We Deserve to Feel Safe": Pompano Residents and Leaders Reignite Debate Over BSO Policing

By Villij News Staff

POMPANO BEACH, Fla. — The sirens may sound the same, but for many in Pompano Beach, something just feels off.

At recent city commission meetings, frustrations boiled over as residents and commissioners called into question whether the Broward Sheriff's Office (BSO) is truly meeting the needs of this growing city. Once protected by its own Pompano Police Department, many residents and leaders now wonder if the city's contract with BSO has delivered more problems than peace of mind.

"We don't feel the presence," one commissioner said bluntly. "Back when we had our own department, the officers knew us. They were in the neighborhoods. They showed up."

Community members echoed that sentiment. In the northwest corridor and throughout historically Black neighborhoods, complaints about crime—especially unsolved violent incidents—have stirred conversations about whether local control is the missing ingredient.

A City Seeking Safety and Accountability

The debate over policing isn't just about uniforms—it's about accountability. And in Pompano Beach, accountability has become a citywide demand.

At the heart of that push is Jackie Moreland, a community advocate who has tirelessly called for weekly updates from the Braggs-Cristwell BSO substation—an ask rooted in a long trail of broken promises.

"Our people don't just want ribbon cuttings and photo ops," Moreland told Villij News. "We want consistency. We want transparency. And we want to know what's going on at that station—every single week."

Her plea has sparked new interest in how city projects are managed and how often residents are left in the dark. The Braggs-Cristwell Substation, a project initially celebrated as a win for underserved communities, has become a symbol of both progress and disappointment.

History, Healing, and the Future

Many residents recall when Pompano Beach had its own



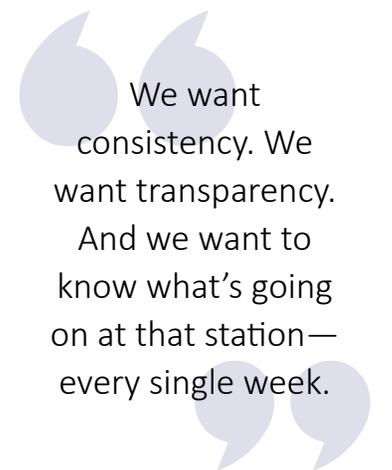
Pompano Beach Police badge from 1990s.

police department—and with it, a deeper sense of community trust. "It wasn't perfect," one resident shared, "but at least we knew who was behind the badge."

Now, with BSO spread across multiple municipalities, some fear that Pompano Beach

has become just another dot on their jurisdictional map.

Still, the fight for transparency is gaining momentum. From city hall to neighborhood meetings, residents are pushing for routine updates, measurable goals, and an end to the silence that too often follows city-fund-



ed projects.

What Comes Next?

Commissioners are now weighing whether the contract with BSO truly serves Pompano's best interests—or whether the time has come to revisit local control. Some have called for a public study or referendum. Others say it's time to hold more than just BSO accountable—it's time to hold the city itself to higher standards.

Because in Pompano Beach, residents aren't just asking for answers—they're demanding them.

Let me know if you'd like a story package version for print, web, Instagram, and newsletter formats.

\$10,000 Reward in Heartbreaking Turnpike Double Homicide of Mother and 4-Year-Old Daughter

By Villij News Staff

POMPANO BEACH, Fla. – June 17, 2025

A quiet Friday night turned into a devastating tragedy when 29-year-old Beatrice Saintvil and her 4-year-old daughter, Janelle Souffrant, were fatally shot along the Florida Turnpike. Now, one year later, Broward Sheriff's Office (BSO) investigators are raising the reward for information that could help solve the case—with up to \$10,000 offered to anyone who helps identify those responsible.

The shooting occurred just after 11:14 p.m. on June 7, 2024, near Mile Marker 49, northbound on the Turnpike, just south of Hollywood Boulevard. When Florida Highway Patrol (FHP) troopers arrived at the scene, they found the victims inside a vehicle parked in the left emergency lane. Both had suffered gunshot wounds.

Hollywood Fire Rescue transported Saintvil to a nearby hospital, where she later died from her injuries. Her daughter, Janelle, was pronounced dead at the scene. Due to Marsy's Law, further personal details of the victims have been withheld.

BSO's Homicide Unit took over the investigation at the request of FHP. So far, the shooter—or shooters—remain unidentified, and the motive behind the killing is unclear.

The brutality of this case—especially the death of a young child—has shaken the local community. Investigators hope the increased reward will encourage witnesses or anyone with knowledge to come forward.

HOW TO HELP: Anyone with information is urged to contact BSO Homicide Detective Ryan Schnakenberg at 954-321-4247 or submit a tip via the SaferWatch app.

To remain anonymous, call Broward Crime Stoppers at 954-493-TIPS (8477), visit browardcrimestoppers.org, or dial TIPS (8477) from any cellphone.

Tips that lead to an arrest may be eligible for a \$10,000 reward.

BSO, Feds Topple Leadership of Blood Gang 'Sex, Money, Murder' in Multi-State RICO Crackdown

By Villij News Staff
POMPANO BEACH, Fla. – June 17, 2025

A major blow has been dealt to the criminal network known as Sex, Money, Murder (S.M.M.), a violent set of the Bloods street gang, following a series of arrests and indictments that span local, state, and federal jurisdictions. The Broward Sheriff's Office (BSO) led the charge in South Florida, arresting 10 alleged senior gang members operating in cities across the state.

MEANWHILE, a separate federal RICO indictment in Georgia charged 30 additional

gang members and associates for a broad pattern of violent and organized crime. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, crimes committed by this gang network included:

Specific Crimes Alleged in Federal Indictment:

- Murder in aid of racketeering – including planned or attempted executions of rival gang members and those deemed disloyal.

- Drug trafficking – such as the distribution of fentanyl, methamphetamine, and other narcotics across state lines.

- Weapons trafficking – including illegal possession and sales of high-powered firearms.

- Unemployment insurance fraud – the gang exploited pandemic relief programs by filing fraudulent unemployment claims using stolen identities and gang aliases.

- Welfare fraud and identity theft – members submitted false claims to state and federal benefit programs using forged documents.

- Kidnappings, robberies, and assault – often orchestrated to enforce gang discipline or retaliate against perceived threats.

- Gang communications via social media and jail calls – members used coded language and online posts to arrange killings, drug deals, and money laundering.

These crimes, while part of the Georgia-based indictment, reflect the same criminal enterprise structure uncovered by BSO detectives here in Florida. The 10 men arrested in Broward, Alachua, Polk, and St. Johns counties are believed to have operated as state-level commanders, directly tied to the same network accused of those federal crimes.

VILLIJ NEWS CRIME REPORT

Teen Arrested in 2023 Pompano Beach Double Homicide, Faces Manslaughter Charges

By Villij News Staff
POMPANO BEACH, Fla. – June 17, 2025

After more than two years of investigation and a multi-state manhunt, Broward Sheriff's Office (BSO) Homicide detectives have announced the arrest of 19-year-old Neil Andrews in connection with a 2023 double homicide in Pompano Beach.

The deadly shooting took place around 10:42 a.m. on March 23, 2023, in the 300 block of Southeast 11th Avenue. BSO deputies and Pompano Beach Fire Rescue arrived on the scene to find two men—Joshua Moise, 23, of Lauderdale Lakes, and K-CI Octelus, 24, of Oakland Park—fatally shot.

Following extensive work by



BSO's Homicide and Crime Scene units, the case was forwarded to the Broward County State Attorney's Office. Prosecutors issued an arrest warrant for Andrews, who lived in the same Pompano Beach neighborhood where the killings took place.

On April 9, 2024, Andrews was apprehended by the U.S. Marshals in Rapid City, South Dakota. He was initially held in Pennington County Jail until being extradited back to Bro-



ward County on May 5, 2025. He is now in custody at the BSO Main Jail.

Andrews faces two counts of manslaughter and an additional charge for removal of a serial number from a firearm, a common method used to avoid tracing weapons in criminal investigations.

If you have any information regarding this or related cases, contact BSO Homicide Unit or Broward Crime Stoppers at 954-493-TIPS.

Best of the Best Miami 2025: A Celebration of Music, Culture & Nostalgia

By Attiyya Atkins

Miami's Best of the Best music festival, the world's largest Caribbean music event, made a triumphant return to Bayfront Park on May 25, 2025. After a two-year hiatus, the festival did not disappoint, bringing together over 12,000 music lovers from across the diaspora for a day filled with legendary performances, cultural pride, and pure Caribbean energy.

A Lineup for the Ages

This year's festival featured an unforgettable lineup of icons who have shaped generations. Fans swayed to Beres Hammond's timeless lover's rock hits, danced to Wayne Wonder's signature melodies, and jumped in full force to the raspy sounds of



Singer Kadian Virgo electrifies the stage at Best of the Best Miami.

Buju Banton's iconic catalog.

"It was a concert I will never forget," said Ayende Anthony, 25, an Orlando resident of Guyanese and Jamaican descent. "It reminded me of my family, my heritage, my culture—it made me want to be more in touch and stay connected to that part of me."

Other standout performances came from the reigning Empress of Reggae, Marcia Griffiths, alongside the likes of Romain Virgo, Nadine Sutherland, Chronic Law, and Soca

sensation Skinny Fabulous.

While Jamaica was well represented, the festival made sure to highlight the entire Caribbean community, with shout-outs to Saint Lucia, the Virgin Islands, Haiti, the Bahamas, and beyond. More than just a concert, it was a celebration of unity.

A Culture of Togetherness

"It's so important that we bring the youth in and spread the culture," said Buju Banton, addressing the packed audience.



Legendary reggae artist Buju Banton brings the crowd to its feet at Best of the Best Miami.

This sentiment echoed throughout the festival, creating a collective energy that felt soulful, vibrant, and deeply connected.

As the night reached its peak, attendees gathered for legendary mashups, with Wayne Wonder and Buju teaming up for "Forever Young," Beres Hammond and Marcia Griffiths delivering timeless vibes, and Nadine Sutherland stealing the show with her presence. Fans also enjoyed Hammond's touching performance of "Feels Good" alongside a young guest artist, proving that reggae's legacy continues across generations.

The production was equally impressive—the lighting, set design, and DJ interludes kept the energy flowing. While the crowd remained lively until the final moments, logistical concerns like crowd density, walkways, and long food lines are areas for improvement in future festivals.

"The music was incredible," shared Juliet Smith, a South Florida resident of Jamaican descent, "but the food lines were too long, and it got really crowded once the night came. There was no space to move."

A Personal Reflection

As a '90s baby from New York, this festival was personal. It was surreal watching the soundtrack of my childhood come to life. The energy was electric, the vibes pure, and the spirit of One Love filled the air. Dancing the Electric Slide with Marcia Griffiths, raising my fist to Beres Hammond's "Putting Up Resistance," and getting lost in Wayne Wonder's smooth vocals—this festival wasn't just an event, it was a journey through time.

With an international draw, Best of the Best Miami—sponsored by Grabba Leaf—once again reinforced its status as a cornerstone of Caribbean music and culture.

As the sun set over Biscayne Bay, one truth was undeniable: nostalgia isn't just a feeling—it's an experience, a connection, a joy that words alone can't fully capture. Best of the Best Miami delivered a moment in time we won't soon forget.

And that's what I love most—the soul of it all, the unity. It truly was amazing.

ABFF 2025 Kicks Off in Miami Beach with Star Power and Short Film Brilliance

**Nicole Friday and Larenz Tate Welcome Filmmakers,
Fans, and Legends to Opening Night Celebration**

By Villij News Staff

MIAMI BEACH, Fla. — The 29th annual American Black Film Festival (ABFF) set it off in style Wednesday night, June 11, with an electric opening ceremony led by Nicole Friday, President of Nice Crowd, and actor Larenz Tate, known for his roles in "Love Jones," "Menace to Society," "Crash," "Dead Presidents," and within the "Power" universe. The pair welcomed an audience of filmmakers, industry insiders, and fans to a week-long celebration of Black cinematic excellence.

Held at the New World Center in Miami Beach, the evening spotlighted the HBO® Short Film Award Showcase, one of the most prestigious platforms for emerging Black filmmakers. Now in its 28th year, the showcase awards a \$10,000 grand

prize to one standout filmmaker, with four additional finalists each receiving \$5,000. Importantly, ABFF is an Academy Award-qualifying festival in the Short Film category, making it a serious launchpad for indie talent.

This year's powerful film lineup featured emotionally rich storytelling and bold directorial voices:

- ManBooBs by Luke Harris follows an overweight teen confronting shame and young love at a pool party.

- A Beauty Supply in Queens, directed by Oluseyi Olatujoye and written by Princess Adenike, shares the battle of a Nigerian mother-daughter duo trying to save their beauty shop.

- ADO by Sam Henderson dives into tragedy as a school shooting interrupts a middle

school theater class's rehearsal of Much Ado About Nothing.

- In Good Hands, directed by Nick Buchheit, written by Yasmine Crawley, explores the life-or-death choices a Black ER doctor faces in the final minutes of her shift.

- Last Hoorah at G-Baby's by DeeDee Casimir brings humor and hustle as a recent art grad fights eviction in Brooklyn.

The red carpet was glowing with appearances from cultural icons and civic leaders, including Ashanti, Larenz Tate, Jeff Friday (Co-Founder/CEO, Nice Crowd), Bevy Smith (host of the HBO Showcase), Mayor Steven Meiner of Miami Beach, and WWE's Titus O'Neil (Thaddeus Bullard), among others.

Founded in 1997 by Jeff Friday, ABFF remains the leading festival for showcasing

■ *Short Film, see page 11*

SUPPORT LOCAL JOURNALISM



Attiyya Atkins

Scan to pay \$Tiyais

Food, Wine & Fête: It's Electric

A Powerful Caribbean Celebration of Culture, Cuisine, and Community in Miami

By Lisaluvslope

MIAMI - Food, Wine & Fête, brainchild of cultural curators Vanessa James and Marco Rodriguez, was a fusion of party, power, and paradise.

ON Saturday, May 17, Miami's Virginia Key Beach was the site of a Caribbean culinary celebration.

During segregation, this "Blacks Only" beach was a safe haven for families who weren't welcome anywhere else. At the Food, Wine & Fête, the sand and the shores told stories of resilience, joy, and resistance, that made this celebration even more poignant.

"This is more than just a party—it's about us showing up for each other," Rodriguez said. "It's about legacy. This is a love letter to our people, our flavors, and our rhythm."

For many, it was a reunion, decades in the making. Old classmates, former neighbors, cousins, and long-lost friends were transported by Soca beats and Vincy rum cakes. You could walk through the crowd and hear the same thing in every dialect: "I haven't seen you in 10 years!"

That sense of belonging was intentional.

The Caribbean region is stitched together by history, music, and resilience—and when its people gather with intention, the joy is palpable. Ultimately, love is the motivation. Love is expressed through hands. Hands that roll dumplings, stir stew peas, and rub jerk seasoning into chicken with the kind of care that can't be rushed. That's what was on display at Food, Wine & Fête. The chefs' demonstrations told stories. From Trinidad to Jamaica to the Bahamas and beyond, each plate was a declaration of heritage. Chef Irie's "Food on Fiyah" brought explosive flavors and flair. Chef Troy Tingling's creations were homages to childhood memories. Vegan options by Chef Kimesha Chong reminded us that Caribbean food



The vibrant Food, Wine & Fête celebration.

is not a monolith.

No Caribbean celebration is complete without libations. But Food, Wine & Fête offered more than just offering drinks—it was a curated sensory journey. From wine pairings to cocktail infusions, the bars became stages for taste. The drinks didn't just complement the dishes—they complemented the moment.

The soundtrack to the night? An unrelenting blend of Soca, Dancehall, Reggae, Kompa, and Afrobeats. DJ sets morphed into call-and-response spirituals. Farmer Nappy lit up the crowd with the kind of energy that only a true carnival veteran could summon. Guiding the crowd with vibrant energy and signature Caribbean flair was none other than Giselle "The Wassi One," the legendary emcee whose voice is synonymous with Caribbean festivals around the world. Her presence elevated the evening from a party to a true cultural moment—igniting the crowd, honoring tradition, and making sure every soul on the dance floor felt seen and celebrated.



James and Rodriguez's vision was clear: to create a space where Caribbean excellence is celebrated and centered. The event introduced the VJMedia x FWF Culture and Caribbean Leadership Fund, designed to support Caribbean creatives and businesses. It's a powerful signal: this is more than one night; this is a movement.

"We have some of the most



talented, diverse chefs in the world—hands down—but we don't always get that mainstream recognition. The ingredient missing from most culinary festivals is Culture," Rodriguez said.

In a world that often flattens cultural identity or appropriates it without understanding, Food, Wine & Fête was a defiant embrace. It said: We are still here.

We are worth celebrating. We are worth investing in. In a time when division is loud, this event reminded us that joy is a form of resistance—and community is the strongest currency we have. And most of all, it reminded us that love is the ingredient that binds everything—food, music, and memory—into something sacred.

CATEGORIES (WordPress):

- Food & Drink
- Culture
- Events
- Caribbean Diaspora
- Miami
- Black Excellence

TAGS (WordPress):

Food Wine and Fête, Caribbean Food Festival, Vanessa James, Marco Rodriguez, Chef Irie, Giselle The Wassi One, Farmer Nappy, Caribbean Culture, Virginia Key Beach, Miami Food Events, Black-Owned Events, Culinary Festivals 2025, Caribbean Diaspora Events, Caribbean Chefs, Soca, Dancehall, Reggae, Afrobeats, Kompa, Caribbean Leadership Fund, VJMedia

Pompano or BSO

By David Miller

Pompano or BSO? That is the new question when it comes to local law enforcement. Let's not be naïve, law-enforcement is critical and very necessary. Pompano Beach has had a lot of domestic violence and gun violence over the past five years since the pandemic.

NOW is the time to look at the results. A whole lot of people feel that the Broward Sheriff Office (BSO) is not fulfilling their obligation to our city. We now know that it's not a rumor. The City of Pompano pays the Broward County Sheriff Office the most of all cities in the county. Our budget is roughly \$63 mil-

lion a year. I say, per year. That sounds like enough to start a Pompano Police Department.

The residents in the city are reminded of a time when they had their own police department. I could tell you over time, personally encountering an officer nicknamed Firebird. It was said that Pompano police were a crew of good old boys and

did not service the Black people equally. What I'm trying to figure out at the moment is could that possibly be resurrected in the same racist fashion. Whose responsibility is it to find the deputies of a police department and also create the budget for it? We do know that being under BSO, a lot of things are included with the budget when it comes to patrolling, such as militarized vehicles, but coincidentally when it comes to detail, that's actually a new bill paid to individual officers. I raise the question myself and even said we pay the department so much money. Why will we need to

have a separate check to detail our events some say that contracting with BSO is a waste of money. People in Broward argue that the sheriff has not changed the murder rate in anyone city. Some hurdles that the city may face are uniforms, patrol cars, pension, and training. Could we possibly use the same amount and get the same materials but better quality of service?

There are small towns that develop their own police departments, like Pembroke Park and Oakland Park. You can go a little bigger and even say, Coral Springs, but another issue that can come to mind is how easy is

it to become corrupt. An independent police department can become a personal police force for the same criminal activity that they investigate. I'm here to raise these provocative conversations.

This is an idea that's already two years old. What stopping us from reawakening a city ordinance with our own police department? What's stopping us from defunding BSO in demand for justice and fair treatment?

Sheriff Tony stood up against President Trump's executive actions saying he will not detain innocent people or target people for ICE and that's going to have some reprecussions.

Preserve Black

continued from page 1

Perkins struggled to keep her frustration in check during a recent special joint session between city commissioners and the CRA on May 14, 2025. During that meeting, she requested a postponement to allow time for city staff to review the Northwest proposal; however, she didn't receive the necessary support.

In May 2024, Perkins called a community meeting to introduce CEO of RocaPoint Partners, Phil Mays, to residents of the primarily Black northwest neighborhood. RocaPoint is tasked with building the \$200 million, 75-acre, New Downtown Project, that is estimated to bring the city over \$2 billion in revenue when completed.

The purpose of last year's meeting was so Mays could hear directly from residents surrounding the project zone that will be affected the most by the massive-scale project, which will be located by the Dixie highway and Atlantic Boulevard corridors.

That meeting ended with a proposal of specific "asks" with the intent of reinvesting back into the very neighborhood where the project will be located.

"Back in the 1970's and 1980's, most of the land in the Northwest was taken by eminent domain," said Perkins, during the joint session. "These 75 acres of land were in the Black

community. Most of the people lost their homes and their businesses at that time, and now we're putting up a \$2 billion project."

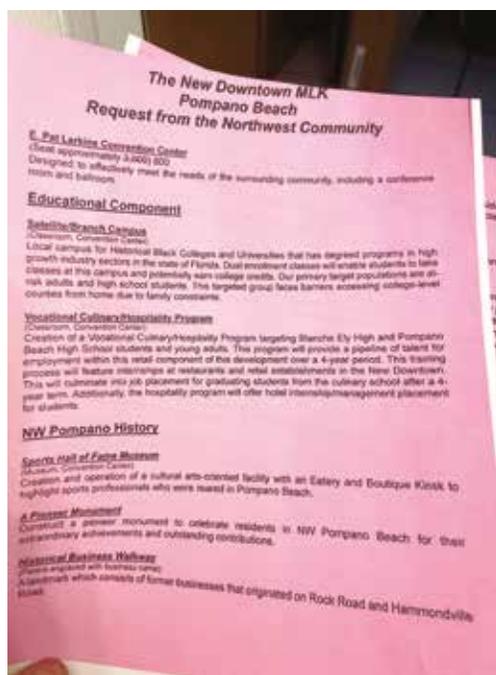
The tree lined, beautifully manicured neighborhoods located east of Dixie Highway are in stark contrast to the historically neglected Northwest district.

"When it comes to our history, they'll move it in a heartbeat," Perkins said referring to moves of the McNab House and the Sample-McDougal House. "But when it comes to our [Black] history, you'll tear it down."

Residents living inside and outside the project zone continue to live in slum and blight, homelessness, drugs and gun violence. Yet, city officials targeted some of the valuable land and used eminent domain as a way to take businesses and homes from Black residents to acquire the 72-acres needed to build the new downtown and new city hall.

As city officials ignore the wishes of residents in the Northwest, the future of the E. Pat Larkins community center and legacy of Black residents and pioneers of the past hang in the balance.

When Perkins called the meeting last year, she knew



it would be a long and tiring uphill battle to gain city and commission support for the Black community.

"All I'm trying to do is honor his widow's wishes, and preserve our history before it's completely wiped away," Perkins said last year. She was referring to Bettye Lamar-Larkins, the surviving widow of the first and only black mayor of Pompano Beach, and the namesake of the same building where Perkins stood, the Elijah Pat Larkins Community Center, located at 520 NW 3rd street.

When the meeting ended, Perkins drafted a proposal of "asks" aimed at preserving the rich cultural history of the northwest. The proposal

was emailed to Mays, RocaPoint, members of the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA), Pompano Beach Mayor Rex Hardin, city manager Greg Harrison, and all sitting members of the commission and city staff. The proposal was never responded to.

Northwest Proposal

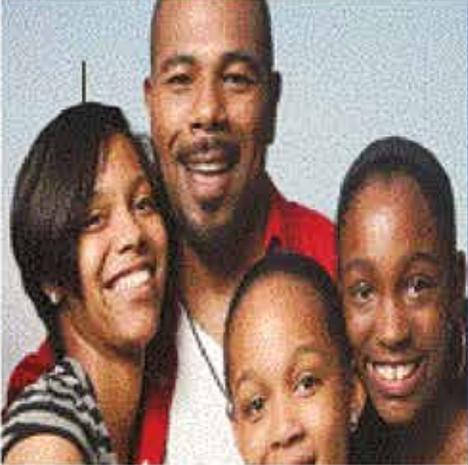
Leave E. Pat Larkins Community Center where it stands, untouched. Create a stand-alone building. Within that standalone building, create a satellite college branch from

historically Black colleges and universities with deegreed programs in high-growth industry sectors within the state of Florida.

Within that standalone building, offer a vocational culinary and hospitality program that targets Blanche Ely high school and Pompano Beach high school students and young adults. Considering that there will be hotels and restaurants within the project, initiate a job placement program for graduating students. Within the standalone building create a sports Hall of fame Museum, that focuses on the professional athletes, including NFL players, who have come from Pompano Beach's schools.

Northwest residents request a pioneer monument to celebrate the extraordinary achievements and outstanding contributions of black leaders from Pompano Beach. A landmark historical business walkway of remembrance to honor the legacy of former black-owned businesses that originated on Rock Road and Hammondville Road. Incubator program to assist local minority contractors with obtaining licensing and other skills to partner with the city of Pompano Beach.

Also within the proposal, is a request for tenant relocation and transition center to assist residents who will likely be displaced during land acquirement. The relocation package should consist of down payments, rental assistance, moving expenses, and housing assistance for eight months. Residential housing for the workforce within the new residential development. Employment of two full-time consultants to assist with job placement, meeting with community groups, and evaluations of developmental projects and programs. Community Trust Fund to be implemented specifically for the Northwest community to assist with homelessness concerns, empowering community schools, and investment back into the neighborhood where this project will be located.



**EDUCATION, CRIME, EMPLOYMENT &
BUSINESS FORUM**
E. Pat Larkin's Center
520 MLK Blvd
Pompano Beach, FL 33060
Thursday, June 26, 2025, 6pm-9pm

Join us and other Community Based Organizations for an open forum on issues relating to Education, Crime, Employment & Business!

Find resources and get some of your pressing questions answered about education, crime, employment and business in your community.

How can I receive money for my education?

How can felons get their record expunged or rights restored?

Where are the jobs for 2025-26?

Where can I get a grant for my business?

Presented by:

Small Biz CEDC in partnership with The Pomp and The City of Pompano Beach

Moderator: Attorney Chris Smith, Owner Smitty's Restaurant, Former State Rep

Admission: Free with Refreshments and giveaways.

Visit the tables of participating social service organizations to get information.

For more information contact: 754-366-1055 or email:

smallbizinfo.net@gmail.com



Panelist

Career Source	Broward College	Broward County Small Business
State Attorney's Office	Public Defender's Office	BSO OIC of Broward
Broward County Technical Colleges		Pompano Beach CRA

Mitchell Moore

continued from page 1

cheer. On Wednesday, May 28, the community center celebrated two exciting additions: a brand-new TechRec gaming center and freshly renovated pickleball courts. Together, they signal a bold step into the future for this historic park at 901 NW 10th Street.

The new TechRec Center is a state-of-the-art digital playground built to introduce youth and teens to the fast-growing world of esports, coding, and digital strategy. More than just gaming, the space encourages teamwork, creativity, and confidence in the tech-driven economy. It's a place where kids can sharpen their skills in a safe, supervised, and community-centered environment.

The celebration also marked the reintroduction of renovated pickleball courts, answering the



Mayor Rex Hardin joins Mitchell Moore Park staff to celebrate the official ribbon cutting for the park's newest additions.

growing demand for this fast-paced, social sport that's taken root across generations.

With these upgrades, the city continues to invest in inclusive,



innovative, and accessible recreation spaces. And with Mitchell Moore Park's deep roots in the Black community, these new additions are meaningful.

The Future

continued from page 1

Broward County whose impact on generations of students was honored with heartfelt applause. Assistant Principal Malcolm Spence was also celebrated for his unwavering leadership, guidance, and the spirit of discipline wrapped in care.

The event was elevated by the presence of the Superintendent of Broward County Public Schools, Dr. Howard Hepburn, affirming the district's commitment to excellence and equity. Their attendance was a reminder that this night wasn't just a school event—it was a victory for the broader community and a beacon for what's possible when young people are empowered to dream.

For a school deeply rooted in legacy and leadership, the Blanche Ely Class of 2025 showed us that the future is bright, and this is just the beginning.

Short Film

continued from page 7

and uplifting Black storytelling in film and television. The event has launched countless careers and remains a cornerstone for Black creatives. This year's sponsors include HBO® and Warner Bros. Discovery, Comcast NBCUniversal, Walmart, Ally, and the Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau, which continues to welcome this cultural powerhouse to the heart of South Florida.

Round Table

continued from page 1

master developer RocaPoint Partners hosted a series of round table discussions in each of Pompano's five districts to discuss conceptual plans and project opportunities for the \$200 million New Downtown project. The massive 72-acre landscape will feature residential and commercial buildings, small businesses and waterways and border along Atlantic Boulevard and Dr. Martin Luther King Boulevard, between I-95 and Dixie Highway.

The New Downtown promises to bring the city a \$2 billion return on investment and has been described as a pedestrian friendly gateway to connect Pompano's historically black northwest district to east Pompano's beaches. Roundtables for District 4 were held at E. Pat Larkins Community Center, located at 520 NW 3rd street.

The main room was set up with roundtable stations where residents could sit with the developer and CRA staff to discuss various aspects of the project. Table topics included: meet the developer, money and financing, new City Hall, economics, opportunity and participation, and downtown ambassadors.

Residents were first shown a 45-minute presentation that gave a glimpse into the massive scale of the project. But when the

presentation suggested that E. Pat Larkins Community Center could be rebuilt into a "new and improved" technologically advanced building or even possibly moved elsewhere, tempers flared. Currently, the center doubles as a voting location, serves as a place for community events and celebrations and holds special meaning for the black community.

"We do not want E. Pat Larkins to be destroyed, moved, or town down," said Beverly Perkins, city commissioner for District 4. "My residents do not want it rebuilt and neither does his widow."

The beloved center is named after Pompano Beach's first and only black mayor, the honorable Elijah Pat Larkins, who served seven full terms as mayor, served 19 years as city commissioner, and who dedicated his life to serving the black community.

Larkins' presence in northwest Pompano goes far beyond city politics. Larkins co-founded Broward County's Minority Builders Coalition to help support minority-owned construction businesses. Larkins lived through Pompano Beach's segregation era and fought throughout his life to provide substantial economic opportunities for black residents.

"This building we're all sitting in was built on eminent domain,"

Perkins said. "Someone lost their land for this building to exist. And even after the new downtown is built, the northwest community outside the project zone will continue to live in slum and blight."

Perkins also stated that after the first New Downtown meeting that served as an introduction between RocaPoint CEO Phil Mays and black residents, they discussed components residents want implemented throughout the project. Perkins wrote a proposal detailing those requests and sent it to city officials, the CRA and the master developer. She did not receive a response. Villij News reported on the proposal details during our coverage last summer, when locals first demanded that the northwest's history be preserved.

Although Mays said that "no decision" regarding the future of E. Pat Larkins Community Center has been made, the meeting included an "options wall" lined with rendered drawings of conceptual plans for a brand-new building. Mays also said, "One building bearing E. Pat Larkins name will always be there."

Consultants for the CRA, titled "Downtown Ambassadors", mingled with residents to "talk-up" the projects' potential. Consultant David Washington, spoke

during the slideshow about how northwest residents deserve a "west side that looks like the east side". But residents said its simply gentrification wrapped in pretty pictures and slideshows.

East Pompano's pier and beach area recently underwent a massive \$2 million overhaul that has attracted big name investors and million-dollar apartments like the W Pompano Beach and Ritz Carlton Residences. Yet over in the northwest district, "west of the tracks" or west of Dixie Highway, the neighborhoods remain in slum and blight, contain hundreds of homeless residents, and is riddled with drug activity and gun violence.

"Imagine the dreams of our ancestors," Washington said. "Imagine the dreams of Martin Luther King, Jr. You'll have children in this room 20-30 years from now. There's nothing wrong with wanting something old and wanting something new. You're in a position to create a better future. Your own Wakanda."

Carlene Duncan, known in the neighborhood as Ms. Smoke, responded, "That is straight up nonsense. Y'all gonna make money. We won't."

Assistant City Manager Suzette Sibble and CRA director Nguyen Tran assured northwest

residents that there will be plenty of economic opportunities, as well as training and business development intended to set residents and small businesses up for success. Tran mentioned that the project is estimated to take over a decade to complete.

"The CRA has partnered with various community partners, including Habitat for Humanity, to build homes in the northwest, plus plans to improve and beautify MLK Blvd, and possibly build a medical center," Tran said.

A special joint city commission/CRA meeting was held on May 14th to vote on various project aspects, including the future of the E. Pat Larkins Community Center. However, Perkins requested a postponement until June 4th at 6pm to have an opportunity to sit with city staff and figure out how some aspects of her proposal could be included and benefit the historically neglected northwest neighborhood.

Considering the location of this massive-scale project, northwest residents want assurances that black culture and history will be prominently featured throughout the project, not just one building. But they also welcome the change a New Downtown could bring, if they are part of that change.

Letter From the Editor



THIS SUMMER, OUR MESSAGE IS SIMPLE: TEND TO WHAT MATTERS

Unity in our community doesn't happen overnight — but we've been making progress. You can see it in the way folks show up to neighborhood meetings, how we cheer on our youth at graduation ceremonies, and yes — even in the fact that most Black people now know at least half the steps to the Boots on the Ground line dance. Progress is progress, and we'll take it.

BUT real unity is built daily. In the meals we cook. The kids we guide. The gardens we grow. The calls we return. It's about doing the little things that

turn into legacies. Walking your child to school. Drinking more water. Calling your cousin back. Voting. Planting something. Checking on that neighbor down the street. All of it counts.

This issue is your reminder to stay rooted. Be intentional. Take care of what you've been given. Because when you build with purpose, those small efforts grow into something lasting — for you, and for the next generation.

Thank you for walking this journey with us. Even if you don't know all the steps yet — you're here, and that matters.

In truth and togetherness,

Attiyya
Editor-in-Chief, Villij News



Q :
Hey Annie, I've been strictly dating the sisters all my life. I've never dated outside of my race, but I've been

on Tinder and there are a few that are making me reconsider. Some of these snow bunnies fine! My family is like Dr. Umar on a thousand, not accepting — snow bunnies never. Should I risk it?

— Don't Tell Umar

Dear Don't Tell Umar,
Mayne, what the helly?! What the hell-you-on?! Have you not stepped outside lately? Turned on a TV? Opened a browser? It is not safe out here to be dibbling and dabbling in the YT (read: white) dating pool without serious discernment and real trust.

Let's be clear: Tinder ain't it. That app is not a safe space — spiritually, emotionally, or culturally. Now if you told me you met Becky at a bookstore, park,

or restaurant? Maybe I'd lean in. But Tinder? That's digital danger.

You remember how we all laughed when the Latinos for Trump folks ended up deported? That same "bless your heart" energy will be upon you if your snow bunny pulls out her red hat.

Look, at the end of the day, it's your appetite. If you want it, go for it — but ask yourself if it's worth the risk. Because 2025 is giving 1925 energy in some corners, and racism ain't gone — it just got rebranded and moved into the suburbs.

So before you dive in, rewatch Get Out. Think twice. And while you're thinking, go tell a Black woman she's beautiful. Give her a hug. Hold some space for the ones who already see you.

VillijNEWS
Gain local clout!
Advertise with
villij News today