



Charlotte actor Chloe Shades earns a national award at the American College Theatre Festival

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TIA DUFOUR

Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents conduct a sweep in Los Angeles, California, on June 12, 2025. Immigrant rights activists rallied in Charlotte on June 5, 2026, to demand North Carolina lawmakers block opening of federal immigration detention centers in the state.

Detention center foes slam the profit motive for incarceration

Local opponents rally to urge the General Assembly to block ICE lockups

By Max Poku-Kankam

FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Charlotte immigrant rights advocates rallied last week against the opening of federal detention centers in North Carolina.

More than 60 people gathered at the Charles R. Jones Federal Building to oppose proposed U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement facilities in Concord, Greensboro and Winton, a small town in Hertford County 300 miles northeast of Charlotte. GEO Group, a for-profit prison corporation with a regional office in Charlotte, plans to manage the facilities, which advocates say could hold up to 1,500 detainees each. One of

the sites is Rivers Correctional Institution a 1,320-bed private prison in Hertford County that has been closed since 2021. Geo Group, which owns the property, is negotiating with the Trump administration to reopen it as an ICE detention site.

There are nearly 70,000 people in an estimated 270 ICE-managed lockups across the U.S., according to the American Immigration Council. About a third of inmates are in Geo Group-run facilities and former company executive David Venturilla is ICE's new acting director.

"We do not want detention centers opening right here in our state," said Maryann Ruiz, community organizer co-

ordinator at Carolina Migrant Network, which collaborated with Indivisible CLT and Stop Detention Centers NC to host the rally.

Immigration enforcement has evolved since the second Trump administration took control of the nation's executive branch last year. ICE and Customs and Border Protection agents have conducted military-style enforcement sweeps across the country, including Charlotte and Raleigh, and remanded immigrants - including some U.S. citizens - to detention centers. Since the start of the second Trump administration, more than 40 people have died in

Please see **DETENTION** | 2A

For grads, NC job market is a challenge

Hiring for entry-level positions stagnant, even in urban areas

By Kate Denning

CAROLINA PUBLIC PRESS

New college graduates in North Carolina and across the country are making noise about the difficulties they face while attempting to enter the job market - one that's been dubbed the grimmest in years.

Many of them say they did everything right. They excelled in high school, went to a good college, graduated with one degree or multiple.

So why do members of the class of 2026 feel like they're being left behind?

It might seem like news of the brutal job market has sidestepped North Carolina given that Raleigh and Charlotte are frequently lauded as some of the best cities for new graduates, but economists say it isn't so simple. While unemployment is lower in the state than the national rate, hiring has slowed down, starting wages for new graduates are on the decline and it's getting increasingly difficult for individuals to find entry-level jobs.

Young college graduates are having a particularly hard time getting work, said Andrew Berger-Gross, senior economist for the North Carolina Department of Commerce.

"We see that for two years in a row North Carolina's college graduates have seen declining employment rates and declines in their median post college earnings," he said.

"... There's a lot of arguments about what is driving this trend, but ... it's undeniable that both nationwide and in North Carolina, effectively there is a labor market recession for recent college graduates."

Please see **FOR** | 2A

Giving circle marks 20 years of philanthropy

By Herbert L. White

herb.l.white@thecharlottepost.com

Collective philanthropy in Black Charlotte is two decades old.

New Generation of African American Philanthropists, which is marking its 20th anniversary this month, has pooled more than \$2.2 million in local grants according to its founders. In addition to advocating for funding, the collective has also amplified the long-standing history of giving in Black Charlotte - which historically took the form of informal settings or through the faith community.

Founded as a giving circle of Black philanthropists and funders to strengthen Black-led nonprofits in Charlotte, NGAAP has grown from 17 members from 2006 to more than 100. The goal, however, hasn't changed: volunteers advocating funding equity and grassroots giving that doesn't rely on traditional models of wealthy, corporate-driven charity. Part of the giving circle's mission is expanding awareness of philanthropy in the Black community through

Please see **DEVIN** | 2A

Post Foundation educator of year counsels students to stride toward success

By Ellison Clary

FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Mary Towe knows she has touched thousands of lives as a Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools counselor.

Towe, the Charlotte Post Foundation Educator of the Year, believes in meeting students "where they are" to support their growth. The foundation will honor her at the annual Post Best Banquet on Oct. 3.

"What's at the core for young people - and all people in general - is that you understand you have value, you are important and you're significant," she said.

A genuine champion for high school students and their prospects for success is how Gerald Johnson, president of the foundation and publisher of The Charlotte Post, describes Towe.

"There is no better candidate for our top educator recognition than Mary Towe," he said.

Growing up in Plymouth near North Carolina's Albemarle Sound, Towe's mother Julia taught third grade, and her father Edison was a high school science teacher. Towe and her two brothers were expected to get advanced degrees, and they did.

Except for one year, Towe has served CMS since 1985, fresh out of East Carolina University with a master's degree in counselor education. She'd previously earned a bachelor's from UNC Chapel Hill in psychology. Her year away was in Atlanta as program

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« CLASS OF 2026 »



WINSTON-SALEM STATE UNIVERSITY

North Mecklenburg High School graduate Devin Cunningham played football and was president of his college fraternity chapter at Winston-Salem State University.

Athlete and scholar pursues his next opportunity through law school

By Kimberly Harrington

FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

WINSTON-SALEM - Devin Cunningham's journey to Winston-Salem State University began on the football field and has carried him further than he imagined.

A North Mecklenburg High School graduate, Cunningham arrived at WSSU on an athletic scholarship after visiting campus during homecoming

in 2021. What started as an opportunity to compete quickly became something more.

"I fell in love with the school on my first visit," Cunningham said.

In May, he graduated magna cum laude with a 3.7 grade point average, degree in political science and a scholarship to attend Elon University School of Law in the fall.

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Detention center foes slam the profit motive

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immigration detention. "One person dies in ICE detention every week," said state Rep. Julia Greenfield, a Charlotte Democrat. "That is not a statistic. That is a human being, someone's mother, father, child, someone who came here seeking what all of us want: safety, opportunity, and dignity."

Said the Rev. Glencie Rhedrick, co-chair of Charlotte Clergy for Justice: "My faith informs me that every person bears inherent dignity and worth, and that dignity does not disappear because of immigrant status, language, race, or country of origin. When mothers are separated from their children, when families live in fear and when detention centers become substitutes for compassion, we are called to ask ourselves what kind of community are we creating?"

The federal enforcement surge has created a market for detention centers, where for-profit companies are stepping in. According to Geo Group's 2025 annual report, the company which also runs state prisons, derives nearly half of its revenue from federal ICE contracts.

"Geo Group profits went from \$32 million in 2024 to \$254 million in 2025," said UNC Charlotte professor Tina Shull, an immigration enforcement historian and author of "Detention Empire," adding ... "Today, there's a historic number of over 60,000 people in immigration detention. Over 1,000 people are on hunger and labor strikes across the country, including at Delaney Hall in New Jersey," a Geo Group-managed detention center in Newark where multiple protests have been held. There are approximately 300 immigrants inside that facility, including several who have conducted hunger strikes to protest poor sanitary conditions and mistreatment.

The Charlotte protesters urged state lawmakers to prohibit immigrant de-

tention centers in North Carolina, citing the pushback in communities across the country against such facilities as well as confrontations between federal agents and civilians.

"We demand our lawmakers take all actions within their power to stop ICE detention and expansion across our state urgently," said Cristiano Mendez, a criminal and immigration attorney. "We're calling on our state legislatures to demand policies that [don't] allow ICE to move into our communities and establish legal barriers that keep ICE and CBP cruelty and terror tactics out of our state."

Said Rep. Jordan Lopez of Charlotte, the first Afro-Latino lawmaker in North Carolina history and the son of immigrants: "We, as lawmakers, understand that in a democratic society laws must be enforced, but as I have stated repeatedly over the past several months, the how you enforce the law matters."

When mothers are separated from their children, when families live in fear and when detention centers become substitutes for compassion, we are called to ask ourselves what kind of community are we creating?

Charlotte Clergy for Justice chair
REV. GLENCIE RHEDRICK



New Generation of African American Philanthropy, a Charlotte-based giving circle, is marking its 20th anniversary this month with a new initiative to connect Black community giving to grassroots programs. Reaching 20 years is a testament to what happens when a group decides to trust and invest in the genius of community," founding member Cathy Peterson said.

Giving circle marks 20 years of philanthropy in Black Charlotte

Continued from page 1A
Black Philanthropy Month, its publication "Giving Back" and multimedia exhibit "The Soul of Philanthropy."

"Reaching 20 years is a testament to what happens when a group decides to trust and invest in the genius of community," founding member Cathy Peterson said. "From our first gathering, we knew that tapping into the spirit of generosity — that has always existed in Black communities — and channeling it with a culturally grounded giving circle would be powerful. Two decades in, we're proud of what we've built together, and we're just getting started."

NGAAP is reimagining the scope of philanthropy with The New Trust, a philanthropic intermediary that navigates national and local funding to boost support to community organizations.

"Support from NGAAP has been more than significant — it has been a lifeline, especially during the last few years," said Harold Rice, Jr., founder of the Black Social Capital Initiative. "As programs and resources for Black communities continue to be rolled back, NGAAP's

unwavering commitment as a funding partner has become even more critical."

Anniversary celebrations include programming and community gatherings,

such as The Cookout, Platinum Edition, are planned for later in the year.

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For graduates, NC job market is a challenge

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'Working hard isn't enough'

Michael Ramos, a recent Duke University graduate, is the first in his family to obtain a college degree. While this should be a time to celebrate, the anxiety has only increased since graduating, he said from outside the North Carolina General Assembly during a press conference May 28.

He and his peers often debate which is better — apply to jobs where hundreds vie for one position, pursue further schooling during a time when education is being defunded or accept jobs unrelated to what they studied and the industries they hoped to work in. They have lost faith in what the future holds, he said.

"It's so much harder to own a home," he said. "Having kids one day, I thought would be exciting, but actually I'm really scared. It's very fear-inducing, with rising childcare costs, and climate change has only gotten worse, affecting the spaces that we love and I would hope to see continue."

"The American dream is not what my parents and grandparents had envisioned for me and for themselves, when they first arrived to this country. In fact, I've only thought more and more of the famous George Carlin line, 'It's called the American dream because you have to be asleep to believe it.'"

Leio Ibarra-Mendez, also a first-generation college student, graduated this year from North Carolina State University with degrees in political science and science, technology and society. He thought graduating meant he had worked hard enough to succeed, but affording gas and grocery prices still proves to be as much of a hurdle as securing a job.

"Last summer, I applied to over 300 jobs with little success," he said.

"Working hard isn't enough when we are forced to get jobs that aren't somehow hiring, afford apartments that we can't afford and afford basic needs when everything is rising except our wages. This is an unfortunate reality that many of us are facing across our state and nationally. Just this week, a report found that over 42% of Gen Z say that they are living paycheck to paycheck, with the high cost of living being the main barrier to achieving financial success."

"We get told to move ourselves forward by going to college, however, for our generation, we are being greeted by (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) on our campus, an unstable job market and rising costs."

For graduates, the struggle is real

While North Carolina's economic state is relatively good compared to the rest of the country, Berger-Gross said this is within the context of a multiyear slowdown of the labor market. The unemployment rate remains low in the state and across the country primarily because there are not mass layoffs, a typical sign of a recession. But every other labor market indicator has slowed.

As for why that's disproportionately impacting recent college graduates? That's up for debate.

For one, Berger-Gross and Dora Gicheva, an economics professor at UNC-Greensboro, both pointed to new research that shows the increase in remote work could be having an impact on who employers choose to hire.

"With more remote work, it's more difficult for employers to train young workers when they're not in the office, and they argue that this is a reason why hiring rates for young college-educated workers have dropped is because of this added cost of training remote workers," Gicheva said.

Research also shows employer demand for college-educated graduates is slowing, so while there's an increasing number of college graduates, employer demand is not growing alongside it. This can be seen in data showing the unemployment rate of recent college graduates versus young

people without a college degree is getting closer than it's been in past years.

And although there's a looming enrollment cliff, where a drop in the birth rate after 2008 will soon lead to fewer enrolled college students, that doesn't necessarily mean the playing field will be leveled.

"If employers had a fixed demand for labor, if they hired the same number of people every year, then yes, declining population growth, an aging population, slowing labor force growth, all of this would mean that employers have a harder time filling positions, and that job seekers really can have the pick of whatever job they want," Berger-Gross said.

"But this decline in labor supply, the slowdown in the growth of the labor force, is happening alongside a slowdown in labor demand, a slowdown in the number of people that companies are actually looking to hire. And when you look at these labor market indicators, it appears that companies are cutting positions faster than the labor force is losing people, so it all kind of depends on the rate at which these trends go."

While workers aren't being laid off en masse, companies are still downsizing quietly. Employers have indicated they are primarily reducing their headcounts through attrition, Berger-Gross said. When people quit or retire, they choose not to fill those positions.

"That's why you have a, frankly, unprecedented situation, where for the last four years in a row you've seen job growth slowing, you've seen wage growth slowing," he said.

"Every survey of job seekers out there has people saying 'it's harder for me to find a job.' You probably know job seekers in your life, I know job seekers in my life who tell me it's getting increasingly hard year by year to find a job, but that's occurred without mass layoffs."

Typically companies will both let go of employees and stop hiring at the same time. However, it seems that there was a level of over-hiring after the pandemic, particularly in 2022, that resulted in labor hoarding, Berger-Gross said. Since then, companies have likely been attempting to shed excess employees that weren't, or no longer are, essential to operations.

There's a perception that those who pursue liberal arts degrees will naturally have a more difficult time landing a job. There has been more of a demand for STEM-oriented fields historically, but artificial intelligence has also been a disruptive force in that regard, Gicheva said.

"We are seeing impacts, especially for occupations that used to have a lot of job opportunities for recent graduates like computer science, data analytics, job growth in those fields is starting to really drop very quickly again, off from a peak in early 2022, so not that long ago," she said.

"Maybe even when people were choosing their majors, they saw this big growth in data analytics, computer science, software development, and so they went into these majors, and now we're starting to see a big decline, and especially the number of entry-level jobs in those fields."

So while some may point to an increased GDP and say the United States does not technically find itself in a recession, it'd be fair to conclude the perception that graduates like Ramos and Ibarra-Mendez have of the market aligns with reality.

"The only qualifier I'd provide is this is not as bad as, say, the Great Recession of 2007 and 2009 because during that period of time, a lot of people were getting laid off, and you're not seeing a ton of mass layoffs," Berger-Gross said.

"But in terms of hiring rates, the rates at which people are actually able to get a job, it is comparable to those previous recessions. So it is definitely, objectively, by every measure we have, a hiring slowdown, and that's in particular impacting these recent college graduates."

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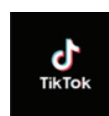
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'We live with fear:' In Congo, doctors face Ebola

By Amy Maxmen
KFF HEALTH NEWS

Harrowing scenes are unfolding at health facilities at the epicenter of an Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

A 25-year-old midwife and a doctor in his early 30s are sick with Ebola symptoms, including fevers and severe joint pain, said their colleague Elisabeth Furaaha, the medical director at SOFEPADI's Karibuni Wa Mama Medical Center in the northeastern province of Ituri.

They had cared for patients with similar symptoms in early May, before the outbreak was detected. One of the patients is now dead, Furaaha said, and none of them has been tested for Ebola, even though samples were taken. The hospital still lacks access to tests, and an adequate supply of protective gowns and plastic masks to keep doctors and nurses safe.

"We live with fear in our stomachs," Furaaha said, speaking in French. "Every day, there are healthcare providers and patients dying."

The outbreak took the world by surprise, with nearly 250 suspected Ebola cases and 80 deaths by the time Ebola was confirmed in Congo. Disturbed by the extent of silent transmission, and by cases in neighboring Uganda, the head of the World Health Organization sounded the group's highest alarm on May 17, declaring the outbreak a "public health emergency of international concern." That triggered donations from around the globe, including a pledge of more than \$162 million from the U.S. State Department to "stop the outbreak at its source and ensure Ebola does not reach the United States."

But despite international attention, doctors in northeastern Congo say that many clinics lack even rudimentary supplies: gloves, protective gowns, masks, Ebola tests, and even clean water. Without rapid action to bolster those on the front line, researchers say, the outbreak will grow exponentially, costing even more money and risking lives far beyond Congo.

"All signs point to this becoming the biggest outbreak we've ever seen in the DRC," said Nahid Bhadelia, the director of Boston University's Center on Emerging Infectious Diseases. "That could lead to regional instability, and that has repercussions for the world."

Some supplies from the country's Ministry of Health, the WHO, and other United Nations agencies have landed in northeastern Congo, but not nearly enough to stock hundreds of health facilities where Ebola patients may seek care. Furaaha has spent her own money on gloves, masks, and a tarp to build a makeshift tent to isolate patients with Ebola symptoms from the rest of the hospital. But she said it's "inhumane" to put patients there before she can afford a mattress for them to rest on, or reliable access to tests.

Without testing, patients who turn out to have Ebola can infect those who don't. Malaria and other diseases have initial symptoms similar to Ebola, causing fevers, soreness, and gastrointestinal problems.

Aid workers say shipments of medical supplies have been delayed by logistical hurdles, such as suspended flights within Congo and between Congo and neighboring countries.

"We need flights to move a lot of things, so this is a big challenge," said Chikwe Ihekweazu, executive director of the WHO Health Emergencies Program. Small planes used in humanitarian crises have been permitted to move, but Ihekweazu said those are insufficient, expensive, and unsustainable.

Moving between remote clinics can be an impossible task because roads are often badly eroded or blocked by armed groups, said Rafaramalala Volanarisoa, a doctor with Catholic Relief Services in Kinshasa, Congo's capital. Conflict, combined with the Trump administration's abrupt withdrawal of funds from the U.S. Agency for International Development, has made Congo's already ailing health system dysfunctional, Volanarisoa said.

"It's very dangerous," she said. "There is no medicine, no equipment, no surveillance."

Dilapidated labs

Researchers at Congo's National Institute of Biomedical Research had built a sophisticated molecular biology laboratory for surveillance in Goma, the country's eastern economic hub. But the lab stopped functioning last year after the Rwandan-backed armed group M23 violently seized control of Goma and shuttered its airport, stunting the flow of international aid.

Other cities in Congo lack well-stocked

molecular biology labs, so they have instead relied on simple, automated tests that detect only one type of Ebola virus, said Eddy Kinganda-Lusamaki, a microbiologist at the biomedical institute. The shortcomings of these simple tests became obvious when the first samples tested in early May were negative for Ebola. Doctors were still worried, so they collected more samples, packed them in an icebox, and sent them to the institute's main lab, in Kinshasa.

It took the samples six days to get there, traveling over bumpy roads and between storage facilities, Kinganda-Lusamaki said, and many were degraded by the time they reached the institute on May 14. Still, researchers identified an unusual variety of Ebola caused by the Bundibugyo virus, with a fatality rate of up to 50%

and with no vaccines or drugs existing to treat it. They alerted authorities.

Later, investigators traced the first confirmed cases back to several deaths from unknown causes in a gold-mining town in Ituri. The Red Cross suggests Ebola was spreading there as early as March, with three of the group's volunteers dying of unknown causes after burying bodies as part of their humanitarian work.

As of June 3, 363 Ebola cases and 62 deaths had been confirmed in the country, according to Congo's National Institute of Public Health. Tallies of suspected cases have fluctuated dramatically, a reflection of gaps in surveillance.

Researchers at the biomedical institute urgently want to improve labs in eastern Congo so they can test for Bundibugyo.



JOEL LUMBALA | WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

A health worker screens a man at the entrance of a hospital in Ituri, Democratic Republic of Congo.

WSSU graduate turns his sights to the next chapter: law school

Continued from page 1A

A four-year student-athlete, Cunningham competed as a tight end for the Rams, demonstrating discipline, leadership and consistency that translated into the classroom, where he earned a place on the dean's list every semester.

Cunningham also served as president of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Mu Epsilon chapter, and balanced academics, athletics and leadership roles that were not without their challenges.

"The main challenge I faced was learning how to balance," he said. "I had a lot on my plate being an athlete and president of an organization. I had to find ways to manage my time and make sure that everything I did, I put my best foot forward."

Cunningham said WSSU gave him opportunities that pushed him beyond what he thought was possible.

"I've always been a natural leader, but WSSU really gave me the opportunity to learn how to lead," he said. "I was placed in roles that forced me to grow, not just personally, but as a leader. Leaving WSSU, I am extremely confident in myself and know that any room I step into, I belong."

Cunningham's academic journey was further shaped by his interest in law. In spring 2025, he completed an LSAT preparation course at Wake Forest University. That summer, he was selected as the only WSSU student to participate in Wake Forest's prestigious Pre-Law Summer Program, an experience that solidified his

path forward.

"That experience was extremely helpful in my journey to law school," Cunningham said.

He credits faculty support as a defining part of his experience.

"From advisors, professors, mentors and even department chairs, every faculty member I encountered truly cared about me and my success," he said.

That sense of care is what Cunningham says defines the WSSU experience.

"Being a part of the Ramily means being selfless," he said. "We always look after one another and genuinely care about each other's success."

As he prepares for the next chapter, Cunningham carries with him a clear sense of purpose. As a Fall 2026 Elon University School of Law Dean's Scholarship recipient, he is poised to continue his academic excellence while pursuing a career in law. He plans to use that education to give back, particularly to young Black men who, like him, are searching for direction and opportunity.

"I want to pour back into my community," Cunningham said. "I want them to see me and be inspired to know that one day they could be doing the same things or even better."

For Cunningham, WSSU was more than a place to earn a degree. It was a place that shaped his identity.

"WSSU helped me grow into a more confident, disciplined and purpose-driven leader," he said.



HEDI BENYOUNES | UNSPLASH

A nonpartisan advocacy group warns the Census Bureau could wind up counting incarcerated people as residents of a prison or jail rather than their home communities.

State may face prison gerrymandering in 2030

By Danielle Smith
NORTH CAROLINA NEWS SERVICE

The U.S. Census Bureau is drawing criticism ahead of its 2030 count, as a nonpartisan group warns it could repeat what the group calls a major mistake in how incarcerated people are counted.

The issue is known as prison gerrymandering. North Carolina has not passed a statewide law to address it.

Mike Wessler, communications director for the Prison Policy Initiative, said the Census Bureau counts incarcerated people in the wrong place, treating them as residents of a prison or jail rather than their home communities. He argued it creates a problem every 10 years when states use census data to draw new congressional, legislative, city and county commission maps.

"It artificially inflates the population of prisons and jails and artificially decreases the population of communities where incarcerated people come from," Wessler contended. "Those communities tend to be poorer and communities of color."

Wessler noted he has not seen evidence the Census Bureau is taking further steps to address the issue. He argued the practice distorts political power and representation in favor of communities containing prisons.

Research by the Prison Policy Initiative found during the 2020 census, the bureau regularly made errors in reporting correctional facility populations.

Wessler stressed his group has been pushing for nearly 20 years for the Census Bureau to change how it counts incarcerated people but pointed out the bureau has made only small moves and there is no sign of

further action. As a result, the non-profit has decided to encourage states to take the lead.

"There's roughly 20 states that have taken some action to address prison gerrymandering," Wessler underscored. "More than half of the U.S. population now lives in either a city, county or state that has taken steps to address prison gerrymandering."

Wessler acknowledged some people believe counting incarcerated people in their home communities could reduce funding for places where prisons are located, since the communities rely on resources tied to housing the facilities. He countered ending prison gerrymandering does not affect funding.

"Changing where people are counted changes where people are counted," Wessler contended. "It doesn't change the fundamental nature of prisons. States that operate prisons are still going to fund those prisons at the same level that they always have. They're going to fund the same staff positions that they have in those prison communities. They're going to have to pay the same payments in lieu of taxes."

Wessler added counting incarcerated people in their home communities would not change how federal dollars flow. While people are urged every decade to fill out census forms to "bring money back home," he noted funding formulas are far more complicated. Census numbers are just one factor, and programs distribute money in different ways.

He emphasized prison gerrymandering is ultimately a problem of political representation: who gets a say in government, and who does not.

Post educator of year counsels students to stride toward success

Continued from page 1A

manager at the Ronald McNair Foundation, named for the Challenger astronaut. She coordinated space camps, a speakers' bureau and student activities.

"I think the strengths and gifts I have include being able to look at a project and break it apart into smaller phases and see what needs to be done," Towe says.

Probably no one else in CMS has helped open more high schools than the four she counts. She helped start Providence, Ardrey Kell and Hough. The fourth, from which she retired, was Charlotte Engineering Early College, which partners with UNC Charlotte. She was director of student wellness and academic support and calls it her best position.

"I really enjoyed the opportunity to work with school teams to make sure they have the content they need," she said. "I was trying to put all the disciplines together for the benefit of students."

The ultimate professional is how Terri Cockerham describes Towe. A retired CMS chief human resources officer and former principal, Cockerham worked with Towe at Providence and Hough.

"The biggest thing is Mary loved her kids," Cockerham said. "She loved the people she worked with. Everybody at CMS knew Mary and respected her."

Though she retired from CMS in 2021, Towe still supports the district's counseling program part time at selected sites. High school students need a trusted adult to remind them they have value and can achieve goals, she says. The key, she adds, is listening to them and convincing them she wants to help with tough problems.

Towe admits she presses students of color "really hard" and that's especially true for young men.

"There are times that I push them a little bit harder," she said.

Antawn Jamison played basketball at Providence and at UNC, then the National Basketball Association for 16 seasons. Semi-retired and back in Charlotte, he remembers how Towe counseled him before he graduated in 1995.

"Miss Towe is one of the nicest individuals you will ever want to meet," Jamison said, "but when it comes to education, she didn't play around. She did the best job possible of not crushing my dreams, but letting me know I needed a backup plan in case I get hurt or even if I did make it in basketball. So get an education."

Tar Heels basketball coach Dean Smith reinforced that advice, as did Jamison's parents, Kathy and Albert, who live in Waxhaw. Jamison, who earned a degree in African American studies and communication, and Towe remain close.

"He's a better person than he is a basketball player," Towe said.

"She's the main reason I am the person I am today," Jamison counters. "She pushed me. I'm blessed to still have her in my corner."

Towe refers to Karen Thomas as her mentor. A retired executive director of student services for CMS, Thomas worked with Towe for 20 years.

"Mary has a heart for children and what's best for students," Thomas said. "She has that compassionate side, but she's also very logical, very smart and always focused on the right way."

Towe also earned a Master of Divinity degree and an urban ministry certificate from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Charlotte. She is an elder at Temple Church International, responsible for Christian education and new member integration.

"I don't want to get stagnant," she said. "With the Lord's help, I want to continue to grow. There are places of impact that God still has for me."

Memorial bridge honors Wilmington entrepreneur

By Liz Biro

COASTAL REVIEW

By engineering metrics, the Military Cutoff overpass above Market Street in Wilmington is a 30,000-ton mountain of concrete, steel and towering earthen embankments.

Stretching across seven consecutive city blocks, the sprawling massif pushed 15 small businesses out of its way. From the minute the plan was revealed, Sonny Nixon knew the highway would flatten the seafood business he had spent a lifetime building. For 50 years, Nixon's Oyster Plant had been a landmark for locals and tourists seeking the tastiest experience on the half-shell.

Situated at Wilmington's north entrance, the wholesale and retail seafood business stood as a welcoming beacon, one of those vacation-bound comfort zones that give a person butterflies of anticipation. As soon as Nixon's came into view, motorists knew the ocean was close, not to mention another memorable conversation with Nixon himself.

Yet, when the time came for public comment during a 2005 Wilmington City Council meeting, Nixon did not fight the project's massive footprint. He agreed that the expanding metro area needed modern roads.

"I don't want to stop progress," he said.

Instead, he championed other people being displaced, urging leaders not to forget the human cost and asking for extra time to find alternatives for those rooted in the neighborhood.

Today, as thousands of vehicles a day traverse the colossal overpass, no trace of the oyster house remains. But the highway's immensity can never match the outsized weight of Nixon's legacy.

Shaped by grit and grace, roadside signs designating the overpass as the Cornelius E. Nixon Bridge greet motorists. Probably, few commuters would recognize the name; locals knew Nixon simply as "The Oyster Man" or by his nickname, "Sonny."

Many stopped by Nixon's just to talk, scanning the place for the owner's tan pith hat, a signature he wore for as long as anyone could remember. When the Rev. Jesse Jackson visited the plant during his 1988 presidential campaign, Nixon greeted him in that same weather-worn hat.

"The other day, I was talking to a couple of neighbors about him," said commercial fisher Patty Rader, who sold oysters to Nixon. "One said, 'I never met anybody that didn't really, really love him ... if somebody didn't really love him, that's not a person you'd want to know, because he was just so wonderful.'"

Rader recalled one long-time customer who carried a creased and faded love note from Nixon, passed to her during their school days, tucked safely inside in her pocketbook.

"She kept it all those years."

Nixon's unshakable grace and grit moved everyone who knew him. Starting as a self-described "country boy" in the Jim Crow South, he possessed the unyielding fortitude needed to become a successful businessman. Born in 1921, Nixon grew up in the Middle Sound community long before the area evolved into bustling Ogden. His childhood was shaped early on by absence, resilience and the relentless determination of his elders.

When Nixon was just 4, his parents headed to Philadelphia, seeking better jobs than Black workers could find in the rural South. They left their son with his paternal grandmother, a staunchly religious woman who taught Nixon to show all people respect "regardless of what anyone did to you."

When his mother returned two years later, the family moved into her

mother's home, and Nixon's business education began.

In a 1993 interview for Duke University's "Behind the Veil" oral history project, which chronicled African American life in the South from the 1890s to the 1970s, Nixon fondly remembered his maternal grandmother as "a top-grade oysterwoman" who shucked and sold her harvest.

His grandfather peddled produce, processed hogs and sold liver pudding, while an uncle was a skilled farmer who both Black and white neighbors sought out for guidance. Inspired by their enterprise, Nixon started one of his first businesses as a kid picking wild huckleberries and selling them door to door in Wrightsville Beach for 25 cents a quart. At a time when local laborers earned about 50 cents a day, a few large buckets yielded a small fortune.

"In a couple of days, you had made more than they made a week," Nixon recalled.

Despite his early gift for salesmanship, Nixon considered himself a loner. He helped on his relatives' farms, tended his own crops to sell and gathered wood to heat the family home. Asked about playtime, Nixon was blunt: "The most of my childhood was spent working."

No matter her son's earning power, Nixon's mother insisted he never miss a day at the segregated Middle Sound school near their home. Attending college became Nixon's obsession. At Williston Industrial, the first accredited high school for Black students in North Carolina, he earned a small scholarship to Alabama's Talladega College, a prestigious Black liberal arts school. Nixon turned it down. He preferred Hampton Institute, which offered a work-study vocational track to Black students who could not afford standard tuition. The \$75 entry fee proved to be an impossible mountain to climb.

"I couldn't get it," he said. "Out of all my working, I couldn't get it."

From moonlighting to an empire
The tenacious Nixon pressed ahead. After his 1939 high school graduation, he tapped the National Youth Administration. The New Deal agency provided part-time jobs for high school graduates during the Great Depression. Nixon used his first paycheck to buy groceries for his mother and grandmothers.

A year later, full-time construction jobs flooded the region thanks to emergency development of Camp Davis, a World War II anti-aircraft artillery training center in Holly Ridge. While opportunities for Black workers were limited by systemic racial discrimination, the 30 to 50 cents they earned hourly far exceeded the 12.5-cent rate for agriculture labor.

Camp Davis construction wound down in 1941 just as the North Carolina Shipbuilding Company broke ground in Wilmington. Nixon called the shipyard his first "real job to start making money," and he maximized every opportunity.

Of small stature, Nixon was surprised to be selected from a crowd of much larger men to be a shipyard laborer. His work ethic paid off; he was soon promoted to manager of a departmental tool room and later offered a supervisory role. Ever the entrepreneur, Nixon leveraged his position to run a side gig, selling sodas and later oysters to supervisors and laborers.

"The selling that they allowed me to do in the shipyard earned me more money than my wages did," he recalled.

With Wilmington's population booming due to wartime defense industries, Nixon started buying shucked oysters from local fishers and selling them door to door from a truck, much like his childhood huckleberry routes. Before turning 21, he purchased

his first piece of land. By his mid-20s, Nixon was running three brand-new trucks to vend produce and seafood throughout the area.

In his 30s, state authorities deemed Nixon's system of buying oysters, shucking and packing them in jars, and then selling them from trucks as unsanitary "oyster bootlegging." Nixon vindicated his trade by inaugurating New Hanover County's first certified oyster-shucking facility, a converted crab house on Greenville Sound. He ran a fleet of trucks and won contracts to supply area military bases and A&P supermarkets with fresh seafood.

In the mid-1950s, Nixon's dream of a brick-and-mortar business on his own land finally came true. He constructed Nixon's Oyster Plant at 6955 Market St. on the property where he grew up, near his childhood school and beloved Mount Ararat AME Church, and where he and his wife, Ruth, would raise their own family.

Nixon eventually acquired dozens of acres, including all the way to Ruth Avenue, named in honor of his wife and where the couple built their new home. Today, the road hosts a luxury apartment complex aptly named The Nixon.

Over the decades, the plant processed so many oysters it helped launch North Carolina's oyster shell recycling program and became its third-largest contributor, returning empty shells to coastal waters to establish vital shellfish habitats. Standing ground against the odds Nixon spoke openly with "Behind the Veil" researchers about the ambition that propelled him.

"It stemmed from the starting of not having, and I always thought my family was supposed to have," he said. Entrepreneurship, he added, was "just something that I figured was part of my heritage ... it was always that urge to be doing something yourself." He also reflected how he managed individuals who could not comprehend that a Black man was capable of — or allowed to achieve — such a prominent level of success.

He remembered a white woman on his first seafood route asking, "You're not from around here, are you?"

"I was wondering," Nixon said, "was I supposed to act different?"

Barriers persisted as his operation grew. While searching for commercial properties during the early



LIZ BIRO | COASTAL REVIEW

Family and friends of Cornelius Nixon unveiled a marker commemorating a bridge named in the late Wilmington entrepreneur's memory.

years of his oyster-shucking business, Nixon was offered a seafood house in Wrightsville Beach.

"But I was told that I couldn't buy it in my name," he recalled. "They had a covenant ... the property, at that time, couldn't be sold to Blacks. And this gentleman offered to buy it for me, but I turned that down."

On another occasion, an inspector impressed by Nixon's knack for the trade suggested he expand into full-scale oyster farming, but advised Nixon to be a silent partner, with a white man fronting the business. Nixon declined. No matter the racism he experienced, Nixon abided by his paternal grandmother's foundational rule to show people equal respect.

Regardless of race or economic status, he called every man "mister" and every woman "missus." When a white Camp Davis timekeeper wrongly accused a young Nixon of being late and lunged at him, Nixon held his ground with the unflappable dignity his grandmother demanded.

"I never looked at whites as being kings," Nixon said flatly. "I looked at them as people."

Lifting an entire community

As development surged around Nixon's hometown, he didn't just grow with the changing landscape, he strived to lift everyone around him. He counseled young dreamers hungry to launch new businesses as readily as he advised his own relatives to hold out for the best price on their family land. Decades later, that guidance echoed loudly at a dedication ceremony for the Cornelius E. Nixon Bridge signs. A group of men who reunited at the event recalled the indelible example Nixon set during their teenage years.

Back in the mid-1980s, they worked as fish cutters for Hanover Packing, which leased space at Nixon's Market Street plant. Observing his legendary work

ethnic transformed the crew, who evolved from what their former boss described as a bunch of kids, fishermen and hippies into an impressive roster of engineers, marine biologists, environmental consultants, construction managers and real estate brokers.

"He would just be out there every day. He was just unbelievable," said fish-cutter-turned-geologist John Lair. "And when he said that we were hard-working, that was like the biggest compliment."

Nixon had taken a substantial risk on the fledgling packing company. "Somehow, this seasoned seafood man agreed to lease the majority of his oyster plant to a 24-year-old kid with little to no real business experience," Hanover founder Peter Mairs said.

As the company flourished, Nixon kept the young team grounded, always encouraging a tight and tidy operation.

"Eventually, that growth, and those lessons, led us toward building North Carolina's first (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point) seafood processing facility," Mairs said. "But before all that, there was Sonny Nixon. A mentor. An inspiration. And eventually a friend. I was honored to know him."

Also in the audience at the dedication ceremony were graduates of Cape Fear Community College's Nixon Leaders Center. Initiated by the Nixon family to continue their patriarch's legacy, the center pairs students with mentors, tutors and career guidance needed to become community leaders.

Nixon's devotion to his community was anchored heavily in family and the historic Mount Ararat AME Church.

"His routine was church, the sick, and then call all his children, the girls and the boys, and hear what was going on," his daughter Carolyn Nixon Kaham

said. "And if I and my husband came to that point where we had a question about a business, he'd say, 'Well, you know, let's call your dad before we move in this direction.'"

An avid reader of business publications, including the Wall Street Journal, Nixon "was just prone to investing to make income for his family," said his daughter Alice Nixon, who petitioned the state to name the overpass after her father.

Nixon worked at the oyster house almost up to his passing at age 90 in 2011. Even knowing the state's impending highway plans would clear his land, he toyed with the idea of opening a smaller oyster market elsewhere. "It was so hard when everything was torn down. You know, not only his business, but you know, that was our home. That's where all of us grew up. It was heart sinking riding by there and seeing all of that gone," Alice Nixon reflected. "Oysters were his life, his love. It's all the history of him."

But even 30,000 tons of concrete, steel and earth cannot erase the enduring weight of Nixon's example. It lives on in the green signs marking the overpass, and in the quiet halls of Cape Fear Museum of History and Science, where Nixon's old pith hat rests inside a glass display case. Mostly his legacy perseveres through the impact it continues to have on the people of Wilmington.

"What a GIANT of a man ... Not in stature, but in honor, values and hard work," Tim Barefoot said in condolences to Nixon's family after his passing.

The expert offshore fisherman and widely known tackle innovator from Wilmington for a time sold seafood to Nixon. So did his son. "If there were more Mr. Nixons in the world, this would be a better place for everyone."

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Reconciling Andrew, Jesse Jackson

The party of Andrew Jackson has spent a decade running from him. It should keep the two things he got right.

I was 14 the first time I raised my hand to volunteer. I was short for my age. I had a bad stutter.



**BEN
JEALOUS**
The campaign was Jesse Jackson's, in 1988. They made me a precinct captain anyway. Thirty years later, I was my state's Democratic nominee for

governor. So, I have been active in this party most of my life. Long enough to love it. Long enough to fight it from the inside. Long enough to know it is named for a man whose plantation I will visit this Juneteenth.

Last week I wrote that I am going down to the Hermitage to help celebrate Black music. It was Andrew Jackson's plantation, outside Nashville. More than 300 men, women and children were enslaved there. The ground is sacred and it is stained. The man who made it was a proponent, and often an active participant, in nearly every vicious form of racism of his day.

For that reason, the party

he founded has spent the last decade distancing itself from him. Dinners renamed. I get it. As a former head of the NAACP, I will say it plainly: most of Andrew Jackson's legacy troubles me deeply.

And yet. His is the third most-visited presidential plantation in America. Presidents made the trip. In less than fully honest years, they came to pay homage to the man who founded a party to fight for working people.

He was wrong about almost everything that matters. And yet, again. He was right about two things.

Working people deserve a party that will fight for them. And they deserve a party with the courage to take on the financial powers that strip-mine families and would wreck the American dream itself.

Those two convictions are the only true spine this party has ever had. They carried it through Franklin Roosevelt. They carried it through Lyndon Johnson. Both men had real sins. Roosevelt put Japanese American families behind barbed wire. Johnson sank us into Vietnam. And on those two things - the worker, and the powers arrayed against the worker - they held the line. The

country was stronger for it.

Jesse Jackson spent his life on a single idea. That working people of every color belong in one coalition. He called it the Rainbow Coalition, and the name was the argument.

That is Andrew's principle, finished. Andrew fought for the working man and drew the circle around white men only. Jesse drew it around all of us. One Jackson started the fight. The other widened it to everyone Andrew left out.

They came for Jesse in 1984, and again in 1988. They came for Bernie Sanders in 2016, and again in 2020. Each time the offense was the same: a candidate who would not choose between fighting for working people and fighting the powers that prey on them. Like a lot of Democratic economic populists since Johnson's day, I bear a few of those scars myself. It is never what happens to one candidate that matters. It is the pattern.

The pattern is a class of corporate consultants who hijacked the party of the working man and rented it back to the highest bidder. They poll-tested the conviction out of it. They taught it to fear its own base and court its own predators. They called this strategy. It was a sellout,

and it lost.

We climbed the mountain on race - the work of generations, against fierce resistance, much of it our own. I gave my life to it. But somewhere on the way up, we let go of the ground we started from. Fighting for working people, and standing against the powers that prey on them, was not a plank. It was the cornerstone. Pull the cornerstone, and one day the house comes down. Rip the spine from a body, and it does not wait that long.

So where did the party lose its way? It strayed from the only two things the two Jacksons ever agreed on. That the American worker deserves a champion. That the greediest interests in this country deserve a foe.

That is the reconciliation I am after. Not of the men. The two Jacksons will never sit easy together, and they should not. It is the principles. Keep the two they shared. Finish the work the first one would not.

I will stand on that ground this Juneteenth. Sacred and stained. Named for a man I cannot celebrate, in a party I have not given up on.

Ben Jealous is a professor of practice at the University of Pennsylvania and former president and CEO of the NAACP.

A life's journey to help working-class communities rise

Sometimes life is preparing us to become something, and we don't even know it.

I spent my earliest years in New Jersey. When I was about six years old, I moved to Jamaica to live with my grandparents. If that wasn't culture shock enough, I moved back to the U.S. when I was a teenager to live with my mother and stepfather in a rough section of Philadelphia called Kensington.

My whole life, I've been going back and forth between cultures.



**ISRA
ALLISON**

There was one constant that grounded me. Storytelling. I learned that regular working people - nurses, teachers, stay-at-home parents - have stories to tell, and if we actually listen to them, they can create solutions to some of our toughest problems.

Kensington was a diverse immigrant community with a history dating back to the very first immigrants coming to America. There were a lot of Irish and Polish folks, Albanians, and a huge Asian population - people from Korea, Vietnam and China. There were also a lot of Cubans, Dominicans, and Mexicans. The feeling and the food, the smells, the celebrations for all the different holidays - I grew up around all of that.

But that part of Philadelphia was also impoverished. People called it the Badlands. My mother was a teacher, and my stepfather found whatever work he could to help keep food on the table, whether that was working as a meat cutter at Save-A-Lot or grooming horses at the racetrack.

There was a lot of drug trafficking in the neighborhood, and it was my responsibility to keep my siblings busy so they weren't out on the street when people started shooting.

People in Kensington looked out for each other, but we felt that local politicians and the government had pretty much given up on us; my neighborhood had given up on the government. We lost a lot of neighbors to disease, suicide, overdoses, or people getting shot. When I got my chance, I left.

I moved to Charlotte and began working as a corporate trainer.

But I wanted to figure out why communities like mine continued to suffer and do something about it. In 2015, in the run-up to the presidential election, I started volunteering, knocking doors for the Bernie Sanders campaign. Pretty soon, I had knocked on doors all over the country, asking people about the problems they were facing.

Eventually, this work took me back to my old neighborhood in Kensington, 20 years after I left for Charlotte.

I was so angry at what I saw that I wept.

The Badlands were even worse off than when I was young. The other volunteers with me on that trip said the place looked like a zombie apocalypse.

When I talked to people in my old neighborhood, I really wanted them to reflect. They told me about all of their problems with health care, education, and housing. And I would ask: Who do you think is to blame?

It all boiled down to, in their words: it's our local government, it's our state government, it's our federal government.

That's when I asked, 'So what are we going to do about it?'

There was total agreement that working people need to be in these seats of power. People who have these life experiences can create policy that directly improves the lives of their community.

When Bernie lost the election, I helped kickstart Brand New Congress, an organization set up to find ordinary, extraordinary people to run for office. We recruited powerhouses like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Cori Bush. We endorsed and supported the elections of Ilhan Omar and Rashida Talib. In 2018, I supported 31 campaigns across the country with training, coaching and setting up campaign infrastructure.

I knew then that this was life-changing work, and what I was called to be doing.

Now I work for Down Home North Carolina. I'm recruiting and coaching regular working people to run for political office, mostly in rural areas.

I see new opportunities in areas that are so different from the one I grew up in, but still suffer from the same basic indignity: they've been forgotten.

The people I work with clean houses, fix cars, bartend, wait tables. Knocking doors and living where I've lived, I know those are the people we need leading our communities and our government.

If we are successful, we will be able to see the fruits of our labor. When we knock doors, we'll ask who represents them, and they will say it's their neighbor who represents their interests - someone we recruited. I know they then need to follow through. They will see that community voices and representation matters.

Isra Allison of Charlotte is a campaign strategist and trainer whose work promotes a new generation of leaders for a powerful grassroots democracy.

Waking to a new day of being myself

Listening to a podcast by three smart spiritual leaders, I have found myself again. I am a person of faith, who for the last few years has been swept away in the dysfunction of our government and the lunacy of our president.



**LIB
CAMPBELL**

I realize that I cannot change this situation. Here is what I can do.

I can wake up in prayer for the world. I can have coffee on the porch, read the paper, talk with Tom. I can watch the dogs frolic and play.

Giving ugliness power over me is not making me happier or better. The ugliness depresses me. I have life this day that needs to sing praise and glory to God. I offer thanksgiving for my home and my family and friends.

I love God and Tom, and I love our church. I will take time to reflect on all that is good and let the other go.

Writing opinion pieces was something I never did. I write prayers and devotional material. That is my lane. Seeing Donald Trump destroy so much made me mad. I cannot fix Donald Trump and the mess he has made. I have more important things to do than get exercised over a pitiful man who thinks he is God.

The spiritual teachers of the morning were Nadia Bolz-Weber, Kate Bowler, and Sarah Bessey. They encouraged seeing the beauty and tasting the goodness of the world. They said, "Despair is not going to save us."

Finding joy is the work of the day. Being at peace with all that is and not worrying about those things that are out of my control. Somebody younger, smarter, and more powerful will come along and straighten this out.

Daddy once told me, "Libby, you are not responsible for the whole world." I'm not. Getting small in the world, loving my family, and taking care of myself is not a selfish act. It is an act of self-preservation. I will like myself better to return to who I truly am.

For years I have watched and enjoyed Nicole Wallace on television. The other day she had John Brennan as a guest. The conversation was about the retribution lawsuit against Brennan, whom Trump had long thought of as an enemy.

Enemies are everywhere for a man who always considers himself a victim. I

turned television off, went to the porch with a glass of wine. I can do more with my time than wallowing in mud and gnashing my teeth. I won't scream at the moon because what can the moon do?

Trump is a lame duck. He is not in very good health. He's very obese and honestly has few if any real friends.

This is a country of the people, by the people, and

for the people. That includes all of us regardless of age, color, sexual orientation and all the other attributes that make each of us unique. We can't let Donald Trump ruin our outlook or dampen our hope. At some point he will sputter and burn out. No one is immortal.

As we approach our 250th anniversary as a country, let us give thanks for the life we have been

given and the opportunities we have had. We are an imperfect state, but as John Wesley would say, "We are moving on to perfection."

Onward and upward we go. That is a much healthier direction.

And I will keep writing. Lib Campbell is a retired Methodist pastor, retreat leader, columnist and host of the blogsite www.virtualchurch.com.

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Sports

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CAROLINA PANTHERS

Corey Thornton worked his way from undrafted free agent to contributor at nickel corner in his rookie season with the Carolina Panthers.

Panthers plugged in at nickel

Second-year defensive back Corey Thornton grows into the role as Carolina's defense evolves

By Jeff Hawkins
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

When Panthers quarterback Bryce Young rolled out during an 11-on-11 practice drill, second-year defensive back Corey Thornton read the play.

As John Metchie III slid on the grass to grab the low throw, Thornton dove over the receiver's shoulder and wrestled the ball away, creating a defensive highlight.

"It was smooth," Thornton. "Just doing my job. ... We're competing."

Thornton continues to prove that last summer's standout effort during OTAs and training camp was not a fluke. Defensive coordinator Ejiro Evero pointed to his practice habits as the primary

reason the undrafted free agent earned a spot on the 53-man roster last season.

"He's one of the hardest workers I've been around," Evero said in May.

"I'll put my best foot forward"

The competition for snaps at nickel corner could prove to be one of the more interesting summer positional battles. Thornton has often been first to man the slot during OTAs. Second-year defender Chau Smith-Wade, last season's Week 1 starter who endured an inconsistent rookie campaign, remains a strong candidate for a rotational role.

Considering the way Evero utilizes the nickelback in his 3-4 base defense, he often deploys safeties Tre'veon

Moehrig and Lathan Ransom to take advantage of matchups in the slot.

"There are a lot of guys that can help us in there," coach Dave Canales said.

"As you know, Tre'veon Moehrig also plays the nickel spot in a certain package. Jaycee (Horn) can go in there sometimes; Corey's done a great job, won the job at a certain point, and Chau Smith-Wade knows our system like nobody else.

"And there's a couple of other younger guys too that'll be competing in there, and that's the thing for us is we want to make sure they know these

are opportunities to compete to help our team, and we're open to whoever wants to do that by doing things right, showing up and making plays."

Among the "other younger guys" Canales mentioned, rookies Will Lee III and Zakee Wheatley continue to forge an identity among the veterans.

"Everybody kind of plays everything and that's what I love about our room," Thornton said. "You can throw guys everywhere. My role is whatever they need me to be - nickel corner, safety, wherever. I'll put my best foot forward."

Panthers pressured to harass QBs

Despite employing Horn and Mike

Please see **THORNTON** | 8A



Canales

Everybody kind of plays everything and that's what I love about our room. You can throw guys everywhere. My role is wherever need me to be - nickel corner, safety, wherever. I'll put my best foot forward.

Carolina Panthers cornerback **COREY THORNTON**

Charlotte FC's Tim Ream earns MLS starting nod



CHARLOTTE FC

Charlotte FC defender Tim Ream has been named an MLS starter for the July 29 MLS All-Star Game against Liga MX at Bank of America Stadium.

By Herbert L. White
herb.l.white@thecharlottepost.com

Tim Ream's place on North American club soccer's biggest stage is set.

The Charlotte FC defender was named a starter for Major League Soccer's All-Star Game July 29 at Bank of America Stadium. Ream, who is captain if the U.S. national squad for the FIFA World Cup, earned the MLS starting nod through a combined vote of fans, players and media. It's his second All-Star game, 15 years after he made the showcase with Red Bull New York.

Ream is the second Charlotte FC player to make the all-star game, following Patrick Agyemang in 2025. Agyemang didn't play due to his transfer to Derby County in England before the game.

The MLS All-Stars will take on all-stars from LIGA MX, Mexico's top league in a match to be broadcast in more than 100 countries. The remainder of the 26-player MLS roster will be made up of 13 players chosen by Charlotte FC coach Dean Smith and two selected by MLS Commissioner Don Garber.

Ream is among five MLS starters called up to World Cup teams, joining Sebastian Berhalter

Please see **REAM** | 8A



Ream

Summer baseball a community touchstone

Durham's summer baseball program is a community gem

Seventeen years ago, Hillside High baseball coach Tony Leak was a man with a plan.

Long story short, and one I've written about many times, Leak met the president of Minor League Baseball to discuss Durham being a test city for a new inner-city baseball program.

"Send me a proposal," was the response.

Knowing his limitations on such matters, Leak made a call to someone that changed everything: Patricia Jenkins James.

James, along with volunteers and supporters, had started their own summer baseball league after Durham Parks and Recreation abruptly canceled its league for ages 13 and up. The city had a league for 6- to 8-year-olds and 9- to 12-year-olds through the Durham Bulls Youth Athletic League.

James was inspired to do something after her then 16-year-old son, who played baseball, asked her, "What am I going to do all summer?"

Then came Leak's call. James submitted the proposal, and the rest is history. Longball Durham was born in 2009.

The league runs May through July at the Historic Durham Athletic Park in downtown. It's split into two divisions: a junior division for ages 13 to 15, and a senior division for ages 16 to



BONITTA BEST

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Eight's great: Independence put unbeaten streak on the line

By Herbert L. White
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The good times continue for Charlotte Independence.

The Jacks, who extended their winning streak to five league matches on June 3 with a 5-1 result at FC Naples in Florida, are unbeaten in eight games. The four-goal margin of victory matched their largest of the season and moved Charlotte (6-2-2, 20 points) to third place in the USL League One table, a point behind One Knoxville SC (6-2-3).

Next up for the Jacks is league leader Union Omaha June 10 at American Legion Memorial Stadium. Charlotte is 3-0 at home in USL games.

Midfielder Luis Alvarez continued led the way for the Jacks with a brace while midfielders Prince Saydee and Jon Bakero along with forward Souaibou Marou tallied for the second straight match.

"This group in the locker room and on the field is something special," said midfielder

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CHARLOTTE INDEPENDENCE

The Charlotte Independence ran their win streak to five matches and unbeaten string to eight with a 5-1 result at FC Naples on June 3. The Jacks are third in USL League One with 20 points, a point behind One Knoxville SC.



CAROLINA PANTHERS

Carolina Panthers defensive back Corey Thornton has matured after his first season. "Things are starting to slow down a little bit," he said.

Thornton first up as Panthers' nickel option

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Jackson, one of the top cornerback duos in the league, the No. 15-ranked Panthers yielded 203.9 passing yards per game last season. An inconsistent pass rush often challenged the secondary to sustain coverage.

To fill the pressure void, the Panthers signed Jaelan Phillips, one of the top free-agent edge rushers, to a team-record four-year, \$120 million deal, and remain optimistic that second-year edge players Nic Scourton and Princely Umanmielen break out.

Tighter coverage in the slot could also aid Horn, who intercepted five passes and held receivers to a 46.6

completion rate, and Jackson, who paced the league with 19 passes defended.

Thornton, 25, took a moment to reflect on how he matured over the past year. He compiled 13 tackles (eight solo), three passes defended and one forced fumble in 12 games last season.

"Things are starting to slow down a little bit," Thornton said. "Just going out there each and every day with the intention of getting better and knowing what to expect, understanding the playbook and getting those reps. With my faith in God, I believed I could do it."

Ream adds MLS starting XI nod as part of busy summer

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(United States), Son Heung-Min (South Korea), Mbekezeli Mbokazi (South Africa) and Lionel Messi (Argentina). He is also among five starters to have previously been selected, along with Sebastian Berhalter (2025), Messi (2024-25), Hany Mukhtar (2022-25) and Andy Najar (2025).

Chicago Fire center back Mbekezeli Mbokazi, who topped fan voting, is the second South African player picked as an All-Star in league history, 30 years after Doctor Khumalo's debut in the summer classic. LAFC's Son Heung-Min is the second South Korean named an All-

Star, joining his national team head coach and former LA Galaxy defender Hong Myung-Bo, who earned a spot in 2003.

MLS All-Star starters:

Goalkeeper: Brian Schwake (Nashville SC)

Left back: Anthony Markanich (Minnesota United FC)

Center backs: Mbekezeli Mbokazi (Chicago Fire FC) and Tim Ream (Charlotte FC)

Right back: Andy Najar (Nashville SC)

Defensive midfielder: Sebastian Berhalter (Vancouver Whitecaps FC)

Attacking midfielders: Zavier Gozo (Real Salt Lake) and Hany Mukhtar (Nashville SC)

Forwards: Hugo Cuypers (Chicago Fire FC), Son Heung-Min (LAFC), and Lionel Messi (Inter Miami CF)

Summer baseball initiative a community touchstone

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19. The staff is all volunteer.

Players have to keep their grades up and school attendance solid to participate.

These 17 years certainly haven't been a bed of roses. "Every year I think this is going to be the last year," James told me 10 years ago.

But just when things seemed their bleakest, an unexpected check arrived, a business donated free equipment and supplies, new volunteer coaches signed up, and another summer was saved.

After Minor League Baseball gave up ownership of the DAP and moved out of Durham, Longball became Long Ball Program - Durham Triple Play after Duke students assisted to make it a 501(c)3 organization, which brought in more sponsors.

Hendricks Southpoint Auto Mall is the program's longest supporter. Duke baseball has been involved almost since the beginning.

Stephen Turpin, vice president and general manager of AISIN in Durham, provides scholarships for high school graduates and a paid summer internship annually.

The Durham Sports Club became a sponsor a few years ago. Despite not being a

member, James' application was so impressive, a club member offered to sponsor the league.

The Long Ball Program - Durham Triple Play is now under the umbrella of Reviving Baseball in Inner Cities. RBI is a program founded by Major League Baseball that seeks to increase minority participation in the sport. Players also have more opportunities for scholarships and life skills training.

And let's not forget, there is baseball being played. Both the junior and senior divisions are the reigning Mid-Atlantic Regional champions.

Long Ball, which has won numerous awards and accolades, has always been dear to me because the diverse league you see today looks nothing like the league when it first began. It was all Black and Hispanic young men that society would rather discard than help.

James says this year is her last. She's said it before and always got talked into "one more year."

"It's time," she said with certainty.

If so, what a legacy to leave for the next generation.

Bonitta Best is sports editor at The Triangle Tribune in Durham.

Eight's great for streaking Jacks

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Christopher Jaime, who added a pair of assists. "Everyone works for each other, and we have that special bond that's showing on the pitch right now. You see it in the football we're playing and the celebrations after the goals."

The Jacks wasted little time jumping in front. Saydee curled a left-footed blast into the top corner off a free kick opportunity for a 1-0 advantage 13 minutes in. Charlotte doubled the lead in the 31st minute when Jaime beat a Naples defender to open space for a pass to Marou, who added the finish.

The Jacks added Alvarez's goal from 20 yards out to push Charlotte's bulge to 3-0 at intermission.

"The first goal comes from pressure, winning the ball, and getting a shot off near the top of the box," Jacks coach Mike Jeffries said. "Then it's a fantastic free kick from Prince. It was a great way for us to start and gave us a big confidence boost. The next two goals came at a time when, in some ways, the first half was fairly even in terms of movement and possession, but we were very dangerous when we got our chances. It's a really good pass from Jaime to Souaibou after a great turn in midfield, and then some excellent individual effort and a quality finish from Souaibou."

"The third goal also comes from pressure and forcing a mistake. We turn it into a

counterattack and get a good finish. Walking into halftime up 3-0 obviously felt very good, but we tried to remind the group that Naples had pushed us and done a good job in stretches as well."

Clay Dimick earned his seventh goal contribution in the last five matches early in the second half when he gathered a Saydee pass for a cross through the box to Alvarez, who put all three of his shots on goal, for the finish.

"To be honest, I am very happy with the great season I am having," Alvarez said. "I hope to keep it up — to continue scoring goals and providing assists to my teammates. We are doing a great job as a team, and we hope to keep it that way."

Said Jeffries: "[Alvarez] covers so much ground on the field and has a tremendous work rate defensively. Even today, some of his chances came from pressure. On one of his goals, he helps create the play, then makes a hard run into the box to finish it. I think he's putting himself in dangerous spots more often than he was previously, especially in the areas where goals are scored. His finishing has improved as well. He's worked on that part of his game, and you can see a marked difference in his ability to strike the ball and finish chances."

Bakero capped Charlotte's onslaught in the 71st minute when he gathered a pass for the finish and 5-0 advantage.

The Charlotte Post

SPORTS CHARLOTTE

Podcast with a home team advantage