



West Charlotte High leads the football pack in our preseason Magnificent Seven rankings



TROY HULL | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Linda Comer and Chuck Assenco sit in their home in Hyde Park Estates in west Charlotte. The home, built in 1962 by surgeon C.W. Williams, has been nominated for historic landmark designation by the city of Charlotte.

Groundbreaking surgeon’s home nears landmark status

City of Charlotte hosts public hearing on CW Williams’ Hyde Park house

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

Dr. C.W. Williams’ Hyde Park Estates home is again a showplace. It’s also moving toward historic status. Charlotte City Council will host an Aug. 25 public hearing on designating the split-level ranch home on Crestwood Drive as a historic landmark. Williams (1925-1982), a surgeon who in 1962 became the first Black doctor on staff at Charlotte Memorial Hospital – now Carolinas Medical Center – was also a pioneer in the city’s medical and business communities.

In addition to breaking the color bar-

rier for Black physicians, he launched a health center in 1981 that still bears his name and co-developed East Independence Plaza, the first Black-owned professional building in Uptown. Williams was a partner in developing Hyde Park, a suburban enclave for upper middle class Black people off Beatties Ford Road. His home, built in 1962 on a 1-acre spread, has been owned by Chuck Assenco and Linda Comer since 2006.

“We’re really excited about it,” said Assenco, a Marine Corps veteran and retired sheriff’s deputy. “We didn’t have to even think about it because we were fond of Dr. Williams and what he had

done in his lifetime, and we wanted to make sure that his family would also be very excited and pleased with what we were doing at the time, with a lot of work. But we enjoyed fixing it up every single day that we worked on this house.”

When Assenco and Comer moved to Charlotte from Kalamazoo, Michigan, they were retirees migrating for warm weather and a community to match.

“We wanted to get out of the snow and the cold and move south,” said Comer, a retired teacher and school administrator. “And Chuck asked me about Greens-

Please see **CW WILLIAMS** | 2A

Court order redeems SAU

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

Saint Augustine’s University remains accredited in the midst of a leadership change.

The Raleigh-based historically Black college was granted a preliminary injunction on Aug. 14 by the U.S. District Court in the Northern District of Georgia to maintain membership in the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges. The accrediting agency is based in Georgia.

With accreditation in place, SAU announced classes will begin on Sept. 2 on a virtual platform. The injunction allows the school to continue its legal challenge to SACSCOC’s decision to remove SAU from its membership earlier this year.

“We are immensely grateful for the outpouring of support from our alumni and friends. Their commitment ensured we had the resources to take this crucial legal step to protect our students and our mission,” Sophie Gibson, SAU’s new trustees chair said in a statement. “This injunction is not just a legal reprieve; it is a testament to the power of the Falcon community.”

Please see **FEDERAL** | 2A



Gibson

Connecting more than just your cellphone

By Cameron Williams
cameron.williams@thecharlottepost.com

ReConnex is more than a tech repair company.

The business, which opened in June, is powered by a Digital Champions Grant from the North Carolina Department of Information Technology with a goal of providing hyper-local, affordable tech repair services to underserved communities.

ReConnex, located at 5430 N. Tryon St. Suite 11, is also a business of social venture. The company is owned and operated by justice-impacted people who are using digital access as a tool for transformation and change. As a result, each employee is a co-owner with an opportunity to build generational wealth while moving beyond standard employment.

“ReConnex is a tech repair shop, but with a mission that goes far beyond fixing phones or broken computers,” assistant manager Mustaffa Jenkins said. “... ReConnex was launched by City Startup Labs and graduates of [re-entry] programs like myself.”

Henry Rock, City Startup Labs’

Please see **NONPROFIT** | 2A

Tiffany Capers new CEO of RenWest initiative

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

Tiffany Capers is the new chief executive of Renaissance West Community Initiative.

Capers, who started work on April 18, was previously executive director CrossRoads Corporation for Affordable Housing and Community Development, a revitalization initiative in the Grier Heights neighborhood. As director CrossRoads expanded its development in housing, education and economic opportunity and empowerment.

Launched in 2013, RWCI integrates quality housing, cradle-to-career education and supportive services in a holistic campaign to end intergenerational poverty in the Renaissance West neighborhood on West Boulevard.

“At Renaissance West Community Initiative, I’m excited to work alongside an inspiring team, a legacy-rich community and continue investing in holistic

Please see **TIFFANY** | 2A



Capers

Flight attendants demand pay raises, better work conditions and schedules

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

The skies can be friendly. The compensation isn’t.

Flight attendants who work at PSA, a regional carrier of American Airlines, want to be paid for work inside the plane – not just in the air. They rallied Aug. 18 across from Charlotte Douglas International Airport to demand raises commensurate with the time they spend at work as opposed to when the plan is aloft.

Because PSA’s routes are generally shorter, their flight time-only wages lags colleagues who travel cross country or internationally.

“I spend at least six hours of the day getting to work,” said Kayce, a Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas-based attendant who lives in Wilmington, North Carolina, who didn’t give her last name. “It takes six hours to get to

work, and then once I’m there, I’ll work 15 hours of the day, and I’m very happy to do so I love what I do for the public and for my crew members, but I might only get paid for three hours of that work.”

Association of Flight Attendants-CWA, the union that represents PSA attendants, say management has proposed a single digit pay raise. The carrier’s attendants voted 99.2% last year in favor of authorizing a strike if necessary.

AFA demands a contract that includes:

- Double-digit raises
- Boarding pay
- Retroactive wages
- Improved scheduling

PSA’s attendants contend they earn more than 40% less than their peers at American who perform many of

Please see **FLIGHT** | 2A

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TROY HULL | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Chuck Assenzo and Linda Comer stand in the yard of their home in Hyde Park Estates. The home built by surgeon C.W. Williams in 1962, has been nominated for historic landmark status. Williams, the first Black doctor to desegregate Charlotte Memorial Hospital's staff, was co-developer of Hyde Park, a neighborhood for upper middle class Black people.

CW Williams home up for landmark status

Continued from page 1A

boro, and I said, 'No, I don't think I want to live in Greensboro.' He said, 'Well, where do you want to live?' And I said, 'I think I want to live in Charlotte.' He said, 'Well, that's a good compromise.'"

Next was finding a home. The couple visited neighborhoods across the city before spotting Hyde Park. The didn't buy in immediately but returned when the Williams house went on the market.

"The Realtor called us and said, 'there's a house that I think is going to go up for sale, and I think you'll like it, and I'll give you a call,' Comer said. "I had to go back to Michigan, but Chuck stayed down here, and he got the call about the house. He came in and looked at it first, and called me and said, 'I need you to come down here and look at this house, I think we might like it.'"

The Williams house had curb appeal but needed major rehabilitation, Assenzo and Comer recall. The interior from flooring to ceiling was faded and outdated; even the in-ground pool that was the centerpiece of gatherings a half-century earlier was in disrepair and overgrown.

Remaking the space required initiative and sweat equity, but Assenzo was intrigued.

"I was so excited about this house the first time I looked at it from the outside," he said. "When I came inside, I was really disappointed because it was in pretty rough shape, but I kept telling myself we can do this. We never had a house this big, a property this large where we came from. But I was so excited about it, I was ready to buy it on sight."

Upgrading the interior was a long-term process to create a sense of

place. The first task was removing the floor-to-ceiling mirrors, then installation of hardwood flooring.

"As we started to live in it and we knew we were going to have it for a while, Chuck would tell me, 'Linda, you've got to be patient. It's going to take a while for us to make the house into what we want,' Comer recalled. "Patience was the key word for me, because I can be an impatient person."

Assenzo went to work on upgrades, with the help of contractors where necessary. Big windows, African American art and granite countertops were in. Out went clutter and relics, even the exterior pink and purple paint job.

"We began to talk about what we really wanted," Comer said. "How can we make this house what we want so that we can feel good in it as well? The kitchen was one of the first things the home had, like a breakfast nook, and then the cooking area, and so Chuck, he had great skills at that point."

"I said one day, 'can you just get rid of this cabinet? It's out and I can't see to do what I need to do.' And he said, 'Sure, I can take it down. You have to move all the things out, though.' So, I was taking everything out, and before I knew it, he had taken that down, which opened up that space."

Said Assenzo: "I'm a patient person outright, and I just enjoyed every single minute, second, hour, day, month, year, working on this house. It was a dream come true for myself and Linda and our family. I was just in awe of what we were putting together in terms of an old house that was in pretty bad shape when we bought it, and turning it into something that we're really proud of and that the neighborhood is part of."

Federal court order redeems St. Augustine's accreditation for now

Continued from page 1A

Gibson, the first woman appointed trustees chair in the school's 158-year history, succeed Brian Boulware, a 1995 SAU graduate, who stepped aside as chair but remains on the board. V. Lynette Mitchell, a 1989, graduate, was appointed vice chair, marking the first time women hold both top board positions.

"As an SAU alumna and now vice chair of the board, I am deeply committed to seeing our beloved institution thrive," Mitchell said. "We are turning the page to an exciting new era for SAU – one guided by a clear strategic direction and a renewed Falcon spirit."

SAU's national alumni association do-

nated \$100,000 to cover the cost of filing the injunction. The school's lawsuit against SACSCOC aims to overturn the accreditor's decision to remove SAU from its membership.

"This is a tremendous win for Saint Augustine's University and, most importantly, for our students," interim SAU President Marcus Burgess said. "Thanks to our supporters, we will open our (virtual) doors on September 2 as an accredited institution, just as we promised. We have said all along that we will stop at nothing to maintain our accreditation and continue serving our scholars – and we meant it."

The school is appealing directly to alumni and supporters to make in-kind contributions toward its legal fund by giving directly to its attorneys, Alston & Bird LLP.

Tiffany Capers appointed top executive of Renaissance West Community Initiative

Continued from page 1A

strategies that uplift families, create pathways to opportunity, strengthen systems of support and facilitate collective impact," Capers said in a statement. "While my organizational home is changing, my commitment remains the same: advancing vibrant communities through connection, collaboration and compassion."

Capers has 25 years of experience in the nonprofit and public sectors to her new role, including 11 years as managing director

at Teach For America, where she led strategy, public affairs and development initiatives. She also worked at Foundation For The Carolinas and the city of Charlotte.

Capers is also a familiar presence in Charlotte's civic circles. She is a member of the Charlotte Post Foundation board of directors and facilitator of its Black Lives Matter initiative as well as a Generation Nation board member and the YMCA Community Impact Committee.

"Tiffany embodies the vi-

sion, experience and heart that Renaissance West Community Initiative needs to lead us into our next chapter," RWCI board chair Stuart Sherrill said in a statement. "Her deep commitment to equity, community-driven change and strategic leadership aligns perfectly with RWCI. The board is confident that under Tiffany's guidance, RWCI will continue to thrive as a beacon of hope and opportunity for the West Boulevard Corridor and beyond."

Nonprofit offers hope for justice-impacted people

Continued from page 1A

founder and executive director, said the underlying goal was to help justice-impacted citizens re-enter society with a leg up.

"ReConnex is a contraction of two words — re-entry and connections," he said. "The idea originally was about how could we get folks that are justice impacted devices upon return from prison? We wanted to make sure that there was not only the hardware, but also the connectivity. You're also looking at device repair, because we know that in communities around not just Charlotte, but other communities when a device breaks, now you're dealing with the digital divide."

Rock is hoping to bridge the connectivity divide as well.

"It's one thing to have a device and be connected, be broadband or what have you," he said. "But when that device breaks, then you're now on the other side of the divide. We find that in many of these communities, for example, the one that we're based in and on North Tryon, which is one of the corridors of opportunity. In these communities, you find a lot of mobile

dealers, the Boosts and the Mint Mobiles and the Metros but you don't find any adequate device repair businesses in the same community."

ReConnex is partnered with iFIX America out of Omaha, Nebraska. They help give what Rock described as the "blueprint" of the business model and how to plan for lowering cost of repairs and making sure they are still as dependable, if not more so dependable as other repair

shops.

Jenkins said that one of the biggest impacts ReConnex had on him is the relationships he's cultivated with clients.

"The biggest thing for me is just the relationships we have with our customers," Jenkins said. "We have certain things implemented in the system. We are in one of the corridors of Charlotte, so it helps with people coming in, and they can relate to you. It makes it better for them to come back in. Some tech repair specs might be like, 'Oh, this is really the problem,' and it might not really be a problem. So, we are just trying to give back to our community not just physically, but emotionally, also."

Jenkins added that one of the most important things is to make people feel welcome when they walk in.

"We have the opportunity as entrepreneurs to serve the community and create our own income, setting up generational wealth for ourselves," he said. "It's just to show other people also, that you can't just be a felon and not be successful. It's very hard to get a job out here being a felon or being justice impacted. So, when you come into the store, it feels more welcoming than you feel when you walk in the Apple Store."

Both Jenkins and Rock see a bright future for ReConnex. While the company is young, the goal will never change.

"I've been through it with life," Jenkins said, "and it definitely helps me give back to the community and give back to people that need our help. If we aren't going to be the ones doing it, nobody is going to do it."



ASSOCIATION OF FLIGHT ATTENDANTS-CWA

Flight attendants for American Airlines subsidiary PSA rallied across from Charlotte Douglas International Airport on Aug. 18 for better wages and work conditions.

Flight attendants demand fair pay beyond flight time duties

Continued from page 1A

the same duties.

"We've faced operational meltdowns, gut-wrenching tragedy, and an impossible cost of living — while American Airlines celebrates record profits," Sean Griffin, president of the Charlotte branch of AFA at PSA Airlines said. "It's time for a real contract with real pay."

American recently

awarded raises of as much as 20.5% for some of its mainline flight attendants.

The disparity, attendants say, is due to PSA not paying them for work done while planes sit on the tarmac — even during delays.

"We're not talking about from beginning duty time to finish," said Kayce, who has worked as an attendant for 15 years. "We're talking about flight hours

only. That's something I don't think the public understands."

"We're only paid when the door closes to the time the door opens. We don't get paid when we're boarding here at PSA, and we don't get paid when we're on the ground serving beverages for two hours when there's a delay. No pay."

Trump's takeover of Smithsonian targets Black history, censors presidential truths

By Stacy M. Brown

BLACK PRESS USA

Donald Trump's administration has intensified its takeover of the Smithsonian Institution, advancing an agenda that historians and civil rights leaders say is rooted in racism and political censorship.

Under the guise of "Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History," Trump's March executive order placed Vice President J.D. Vance in charge of purging Smithsonian exhibitions of what the White House calls "divisive" narratives, targeting especially those that address race, slavery, and systemic injustice.

The latest moves include the removal of references to Trump's two impeachments from the National Museum of American History's "Limits of Presidential Power" exhibit. Smithsonian officials claimed the change was part of a "restoration" to the exhibit's 2008 version, but ABC News reported on Aug. 1 that it followed White House pressure during a broader content review.

Trump is the only U.S. president impeached twice — once in 2019 for abuse of power and obstruction of Congress, and again in 2021 for incitement of insurrection — but both were temporarily erased from the museum's public record.

The administration's focus has been even more aggressive toward the National Museum of African American History and Culture. In April, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones told Black Press USA that Trump's targeting of the

museum's slavery section "is a sign of a deep sickness" and that "to erase or minimize the slavery and freedom part of that story is to create a fantasy of how we got here."

She warned, "We literally would not be in the United States without slavery."

Civil rights icon Dr. Amos C. Brown, speaking on April 29 on the Black Press USA's "Let It Be Known" show, revealed that the museum had abruptly returned historic artifacts he had loaned—a Bible from the civil rights era and one of the earliest histories of Black people in America—without discussion.

"This is a direct result of Project 2025," Brown said. "There is a move in this country to induce cultural and historical Alzheimer's."

Smithsonian Secretary Lonnie Bunch, who has led the institution since 2019, has publicly pledged to "remain committed to telling the multi-faceted stories of this country's extraordinary heritage" despite the White House directive. But Trump's order grants Vance authority over content, funding, and even appointments to the Board of Regents—an unprecedented level of federal interference in the 178-year-old institution's governance.

The scope of the takeover, outlined in an Aug. 12 White House letter to Bunch, demands access to internal curatorial documents, exhibition plans, and educational materials from eight major museums.

Lack of civics instruction leads to falling engagement

By Sarah Michel
CAROLINA PUBLIC PRESS

On a national stage, North Carolina often serves as a state to watch for its purple and swingy political nature. However, its own citizens are opting out of civic engagement at higher rates than most of the country, according to the 2024 Civic Health Index. Ineffective civics education could be part of the problem.

Independence High School junior April Alonso knows this firsthand. She struck out the first time she tried getting her fellow students at the Charlotte school to pre-register to vote.

For her AP Government & Politics class, Alonso had to do a service project. She enlisted friends to walk around the cafeteria at lunchtime and get 16- and 17-year olds to pre-register. "They seemed pretty uncertain," Alonso said. "It kind of felt like, if I were to make them register to vote, they would go down a drain or something. Like they acted like it was some kind of punishment."

The second time around, Alonso sweetened the deal. Anyone who pre-registered would get a few pieces of candy. Suddenly, she had buy-in.

Brandon Rivers has also encountered his fair share of seemingly apathetic students in his time as executive director of the Charlotte Democracy Center, a nonpartisan organization focusing on voter education, specifically in marginalized communities.

Rivers spends a lot of time giving classroom presentations on voting before offering pre-registration to students.

Sometimes, students tell him they're not interested. Rivers isn't deterred; he asks them what they care about.

Making money?

The state government sets tax policy and minimum wage, so they might want to pay attention to

that.

A safe neighborhood? The city council decides how much to pay local police officers and firefighters, as well as how much to budget for street lighting, so they may be interested in voting in that election.

Bridging the connection between students' interests and government policy is key to getting them motivated to vote, Rivers said. Making the lesson interesting is also imperative; he's competing with students' phones and friends for attention.

Right now, the distractions and disconnect may be winning. According to the 2024 Civic Health Index, North Carolina lags most of the country on several key markers of civic engagement.

Turnout in the 2022 midterm elections and voter registration fell short of the national average. North Carolinians regularly discussed political and social issues with friends, families and neighbors less often than in most states. In several areas — participation in public meetings, contacting public officials and frequent consumption of political news — the state placed in the bottom 10.

While there could be a host of reasons for North Carolina's relative disengagement, one factor is at the center of it all: civic education, or the lack thereof.

Civic education teaches students how their government works, and their place in it. If done well, it arms them with the knowledge, confidence and motivation to participate in their local communities, and demonstrates the influence they can have in governmental decision making.

But too often, civic education is pushed to the side to make way for other priorities, and what instruction remains may be watered down to avoid

conflict.

"It's really just the Wild West"

In 1997, North Carolina public leaders sensed a looming crisis. They worried that North Carolina's civic education was inadequate and would lead to a generation of citizens unprepared to lead their communities.

They worked with the North Carolina Civic Education Consortium in UNC Chapel Hill's School of Government to develop a report on the state's civic health.

The report, published in 2003, centered around a phone survey of 800 teens and 800 adults, found that household income was the best predictor of civic engagement. Wealthier adults and students from high-income families were more likely to have worked with others to solve a community issue, discussed political issues at home, contacted public officials and showed interest in voting, among other civic activities.

Two decades later, these patterns persist. White North Carolinians report greater engagement than their Black counterparts in every indicator of civic health besides participation in public meetings. College-educated citizens also surged ahead of citizens with less formal education, and North Carolinians 30 and older reported significantly higher involvement than younger generations.

Education in civics should level the playing field, in theory. But, it isn't.

North Carolina's civic education is inconsistently taught, said Burke Middle College civics and personal finance teacher Timothy Barnsback.

"It's really just the Wild West," he said. "You have either great civics teachers or not-great civics teachers, and there's not a whole lot of middle ground. It takes being passionate about it to actually make it a really meaningful

course for students."

Barnsback has been teaching social studies since 2000. He started with middle school, where the curriculum was more about rote knowledge and less about active civic engagement. But now that he teaches high school seniors, he makes an effort to make his instruction more interactive and student-focused.

He doesn't have to do that. North Carolina's standards are very flexible — it comes down to how much each individual teacher is willing to invest in their students. Not every teacher has the desire or resources to do so.

There's some truth to the stereotype that coaches with minimal background in the subject matter are often also assigned the social studies class, Barnsback said. In his years of helping create professional development resources for social studies teachers, he's noticed a trend of male teachers not specifically trained to teach social studies who bounce between history and civics on the one hand and physical education on the other, depending on where they can get a coaching job.

To exacerbate matters, the state does not designate funding for civic education or service-learning projects, according to an open records request.

While a \$120,000 character education budget exists, professional development competes with various other priorities for the relatively small pool of money.

In practice, professional development is "do it yourself and handle it at the local level," Barnsback said.

"So there's not a depth of knowledge, and to be honest, there's not a real investment in teaching it properly," he added.

Vague state standards

When Rockingham Early College High School social studies teacher Valencia

Abbott gets to the lesson about the roles, powers and functions of different types of local governments, she conducts a special assignment called, "Who represents me?"

She divides her students into groups based on their addresses, and has them search for their mayor, town council and other local representatives. Then, she shows them how they can contact these officials if they ever want to bring up an issue or offer their input.

Regardless of whether her students stay in Rockingham County, the lesson will stick with them, Abbott said.

"These are the things that we do in our system that we have, and they know the steps, and then they'll be less hesitant next time with that," she said.

While Abbott chooses to connect the standard to real-life civic engagement, she could just as easily present a Powerpoint on the various levels of local government and call it a day. Teaching is very personal, she said; everyone will approach it differently, and trying to enforce any level of uniformity is likely to be a futile exercise.

"I'm going to do my job to the best of my ability, despite my little paycheck every month, but I also know that there are teachers who come in and do the bare minimum every day," she said.

That doesn't mean the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction doesn't try to develop effective content standards.

In 2021, DPI revised the standards, which serve as a guide for local education authorities as they develop curriculum for districts.

While North Carolina's standards integrate civics into broader social studies instruction beginning in kindergarten, no stand-alone civics course exists until high school.

By second grade, students are supposed to be

able to "exemplify ways individuals and groups shape communities and contribute to the making of rules and laws," according to the state standards. In fourth grade, students should be preparing to be "responsible and informed citizens" by studying the state Constitution and separation of powers.

In eighth grade, North Carolinians delve into the founding documents and ideals of the state and nation, and should be able to "use a range of civic approaches to address problems being investigated."

If this all seems vague, you're not alone.

After the 2021 standards were released, North Carolina earned a failing grade from the conservative educational think tank Fordham Institute, which found the content, rigor, clarity and organization of the standards lacking. The report pulled no punches.

"Grades three and four target state and local government, but not in a way that is likely to promote understanding."

"...the civics standards for (fifth) grade provide dubious guidance."

"Here, again, the standards tease big concepts... but offer nothing concrete."

"Finally, although the inquiry strand includes a category on 'taking informed action,' it is thoroughly uninspiring."

STEM-first mentality

When Nicole Clarke, a social studies teacher at Vance County's Clarke Elementary school, came to the U.S. from Jamaica to teach, she quickly realized social studies played second fiddle to math and reading.

Teachers take note of the hierarchy.

"Because it's not a tested subject, and much focus is not placed on it, then people don't tend to put their all into it like they would do for literacy and math and science," Clarke said.

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The Voice of the Black Community

Gerald O. Johnson | CEO/PUBLISHER

gerald.johnson@thecharlottepost.com

André P. Johnson | CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

andre.johnson@thecharlottepost

Herbert L. White | EDITOR IN CHIEF

herb.white@thecharlottepost.com

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Mementos ‘felt like telling the truth’

By Robert C. Koehler

PEACEVOICE

I’m planning to put my house on the market, which means I have to empty it.

No big deal, right? Go through the stuff, get rid of most of it. This is necessary, young man, so do it! Instead, here I am, doing the opposite. I’m writing about it, indeed, internally screaming with amazement.

When you’re my age (and no, I’m not actually a young man), cleaning out the house in which I’ve lived for the last 40 years means digging through my life, almost all of it, and even more, apparently – e.g., boxes of miscellany rescued from my parents’ house decades ago, then stashed away and forgotten. But now it’s all cascading back to me – recent memories, old memories, and lots and lots of: “Huh? What the hell is this?”

This is an old man’s treasure hunt, which complicates the actual task of emptying the house and getting it ready to be sold. The problem for me is how easily I get lost in the treasure trove of whatever – how easily I lose a sense of the task at hand and simply focus my attention on what I’m finding . . . not only ogling it but analyzing it, absorbing it, getting lost in it. This is not an abstract process – not for me it isn’t, especially considering that, because I’m a lifelong writer, I’m coming upon lots and lots and lots of forgotten work, going back multiple decades: essays, journalism, fiction, poetry, classroom assignments, unfinished novels. The temptation to start reading this or that or that is endless, and as I say, here I am: not just putting stuff in boxes. I’m letting myself get pulled into my words and, in the process, pondering – pursuing – yet again, the meaning of life.

And I invite you to join me.

Here, for instance, is an excerpt from a piece I wrote back in the mid-’90s for a zine that I was involved with called U-direct. I bring it back into public view today simply because the issue still eats at my soul. We all have voices. We all deserve to be heard, not simply categorized (as per our so-called education system) . . . and oh so often, dismissed as unintelligent, a.k.a., stupid.

Over the years, my primary side work has been teaching writing. I taught it to people of all ages, from elementary-school kids to adults. For a while I had a gig with an organization called The Chicago Teachers Center, working at several low-income high schools on the city’s West Side. I worked with the teachers, encouraging them to reach out to their students beyond the rules. Writing starts with telling the truth, not spelling correctly or getting your commas right. That comes later.

“One of my assigned schools,” I wrote:

“was Orr High School. The school resonates with memories for me – of kids with so much to say, so little encouragement to say it. Orr is in the heart of the city’s poverty belt. And the education system, as it reduced the kids to their standardized test results, seemed like part of an army of occupation.

“I spent my time with three classes, pretty much countering everything they’d been taught about how to write. I’d read aloud pieces of writing that I hoped spoke to their lives – often accounts of gang life – get a discussion going, then have them write for about 10 minutes. I called it free writing: ‘Write what you’re thinking right now. Don’t worry about spelling or grammar. Let your voice loose. Surprise yourself!’ Here’s what happened in one of my classes in my second week at Orr.

“When the ten minutes were up, I looked around the room for volunteers to read what they’d written. As usual, there were none. I caught Patrick’s eye and said, ‘How about it?’

“He shrugged and began to read. ‘I don’t know what to write. It’s kind of hard growing up when everyone you know...’ And then he stopped, his voice so choked he couldn’t continue. He looked down at his feet, then, in a burst of anger, balled up his paper and threw it into a corner. The bell rang.

“‘That’s OK,’ I said. ‘That’s OK. Sometimes writing stirs up your emotions.’”

“He didn’t look at me, just dashed out of the room with the others. I retrieved the balled sheet of paper from the corner and put it into my briefcase with the rest of that day’s writing and didn’t read it until I got home. As I did so, spooning a lonely lunch of Thai food out of its paper carton, all the weariness left my bones, left my heart. Here’s what he wrote, unedited:

“‘I don’t know what to write. It’s kind of hard growing up when everyone you know and grow up with dies or gets killed. You can’t turn to no one even now the Police is putting drugs on you saying that you already had them. so when it’s my turn to go there won’t be no crying. Because we were all Born dieing.’

“As despairing as the words were, I couldn’t contain my elation. I wanted to cry and shout and dance around the room, thundering ‘Hallelujah!’ I wanted to dance all the way back to the West Side, show off Patrick’s words to whomever would read them. He had broken through.

And three decades later, as I pack up these words, I’m still coming to know it.

Robert Koehler is a Chicago award-winning journalist and editor. He is the author of “Courage Grows Strong at the Wound,” and his album of recorded poetry and art work, Soul Fragments.

Can people like us go home again?

Here’s a trivia question: Name a novel by a North Carolina writer about a fictional author who traveled abroad and struggled with returning to the complexities of American culture?

If you know your North Carolina literary history, your knee-jerk reaction might be “You Can’t Go Home Again” by Thomas Wolfe. Published in 1940 after Wolfe’s death, the plot follows an author who wrote an acclaimed book, traveled to Paris, London, and New York, and struggles with being able to return to his hometown.

If you are up to date with more current North Carolina authors, you know that these themes are explored afresh by our most recent National Book Award winner, Jason Mott. Mott grew up and still lives in Columbus County, is a double graduate of UNC-Wilmington, and is a professor there. He’s a North Carolinian through and through.

In his new novel, “People Like Us,” the question of whether you can return home again is alive, well, and all too pertinent.

If you have not read any

of Mott’s novels, you have a treat ahead of you. Mott bends genres and leans into his background and expertise as a poet to create visceral, vivid scenes that make his books hard to put down.

I’m drawn to realistic fiction and generally like to keep both my feet on solid ground. I shy away from anything with too much shape-shifting or supernatural elements.

Mott’s debut novel, “The Returned,” published in 2011, featured the re-appearance in fully-human form of people who died years ago. I’ll admit, I was skeptical. But his ability to persuade literalists like me to suspend disbelief opened the door to my enjoying his provocative stories, laced with intoxicating magical realism.

In his 2018 novel “The Crossing,” he blurred the lines of reality in a dystopian story of teenage twins coping in a world battered by deadly disease and war. And then, in 2021, he captured the National Book Award with “Hell of a Book” using surreal elements, “audacity and invention” to wow the panel of judges.

And now, fresh off the presses, “People Like Us,” while not exactly a sequel to “Hell of a Book,” pulls some of the same characters

into yet another blending of the mundane and the otherworldly. Mott’s toolbox of magical realism, time travel, and hallucinatory passages allows his characters—and his readers—to process difficult issues.

Stretching from familiar North Carolina all the way up to the cold reaches of Minnesota and even farther, across the Atlantic to Europe, Mott uses interlocking storylines of two main narrators who are alike in some ways but shaped by their own unique struggles.

Mott situates us on ground we recognize—post-pandemic America, full of both sunshine and lurking, dark shadows. He doesn’t flinch from the hard stuff—gun violence, divorce, suicide, racism —laying them out with an honesty that startles.

He treats these weighty themes not just with the gravity they demand, but with a surprising mix of wit, irony, and even tenderness. Mott pulls it off with grace, vivid detail, and, at times, something close to poetry.

For anyone who has wondered if they belong in their family, in their school, in their hometown, or in their country, Mott offers a reminder that’s both bracing and comfort-

ing: those doubts are not yours alone. You’re not as alone — or as different — as you might think.

No matter your view on the Second Amendment, no matter your race, no matter if you are a Southerner or someone from the Midwest, you’ll see yourself in these characters. They are grieving, struggling with questions of identity and belonging, and searching to find their place, whether that means a spot on the map, a moment in history, or a role within their own family.

In “People Like Us,” Mott makes it clear: there are, indeed, people like you.

Mott picks up where Wolfe and other North Carolina writers have left off, wrestling with the question of whether we can or can’t go home again. Percolating amidst the rollicking exploration of this question lies something even darker: a quiet alarm about the direction our country—our home—is taking.

One character even suggests that “hell, for the right price, leaving America just might be the new American Dream.” You might find yourself nodding in agreement.

D.G. Martin is a retired UNC System vice president and former host of PBS NC’s “North Carolina Book-watch.”

Modesty a sacred shield in age of pressure

By Ehsan Nguyen

SPECIAL TO THE POST

In generations past, modesty was a widely respected value — not only in religious circles but in broader social and cultural life.

From Victorian England to 1950s America, and from the villages of the East to towns across Europe, modesty in dress and behavior was seen as a sign of dignity and self-respect. Women dressed with the intention of presenting themselves with grace rather than for public validation.

Even in naming conventions, values like purity and modesty were celebrated — Chastity was once a common name for girls, reflecting the cultural admiration for inner virtue.

Though societies were far from perfect, there was, at least, a common understanding that a woman’s worth did not lie in the amount of skin she showed or the attention she could garner from others.

Today, that moral compass has tilted dramatically. Modesty — once a source of inner strength — is now often ridiculed as repression, particularly in media, pop culture, and advertising. Girls and young women are bombarded with a single message: to be seen is to be valued. Social media platforms reward appearances, not depth.

Influencers and celebrities set unrealistic standards of beauty, often photoshopped and filtered beyond reality. In this world, worth is increasingly measured in likes, views, and external approval — not character, faith, or intellect.

This cultural shift has taken a severe emotional toll. According to a 2023 CDC report, teenage girls in the U.S. are experiencing record-high levels of anxiety, sadness, and suicidal thoughts. A 2021 internal study by Facebook revealed that Instagram worsens body image issues for 1 in 3 teen girls. Constant comparison, peer pressure, and digital validation have left many girls feeling inadequate, invisible, or ashamed of who they are.

Modesty, in this context, is not about hiding — it’s about honoring. It is a quiet declaration of self-worth. It teaches girls that their value is not tied to how much they show but to who they are inside. Modesty allows them to step away from performative living and instead cultivate dignity, intellect,

and spiritual strength.

In Islam, modesty is described as a branch of faith. The Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace upon him) said, “Modesty brings nothing but good.” The Qur’an urges both men and women to lower their gaze and guard their chastity, showing that modesty is not just about dress, but about behavior and inner consciousness.

In Christianity, Timothy 2:9 advises women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety. Judaism teaches tzniut, a concept of humility and reserve that applies to both men and women.

The Promised Messiah, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (peace on him), taught that modesty stems from righteousness and God-consciousness. The

worldwide head of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad, has repeatedly warned against the overexposure of youth and reminded girls that modesty is not weakness, but strength.

Let us teach our daughters that their bodies are sacred, not for sale.

Ehsan Nguyen lives in Charlotte.

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Johnson C. Smith football coach Maurice Flowers and quarterback Kelvin Durham confer during practice at Eddie McGirt Field on Aug. 16 in Charlotte. Durham, who transferred from Fort Valley State, was one of Flowers' first recruits with the Wildcats and familiar with his offensive philosophy going into his lone season as the Golden Bulls' starter.

JC Smith reunion ‘a blessing’ for QB

All-SIAC Kelvin Durham reunites with coach Maurice Flowers, who recruited him to Fort Valley State

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

Kelvin Durham will finally get to play quarterback for Maurice Flowers. Their relationship, which started five years ago at Fort Valley State, picks up at Johnson C. Smith, where the Golden Bulls are a preseason favorite to advance to the CIAA title game. Durham, an all-SIAC pick at Fort Valley State, is pleased to have opportunity. "It's just a blessing, really, just being able to be under coach Flowers again," he said. "[Flowers] recruited me out of high school, [but] I didn't get to play a season under him. I'm just ... happy

to be here and just looking forward to the season." Durham, a standout at South Dade High in Homestead, Florida, thrived at Fort Valley State, where he earned SIAC freshman of the year in 2021 and first team all-conference in 2022. In 29 games over three seasons with the Wildcats, Durham passed for 5,922 yards and 56 touchdowns while running for six more. His best season was 2024 with a career-high 2,096 passing yards and 23



Flowers



Durham

scores. FVSU went 22-11 during that span with a pair of eight-win seasons. As a sophomore, he quarterbacked the Wildcats to a win against JCSU in the Florida Beach Bowl by connecting on 10-of-14 passes for 167 yards and two touchdowns to earn the MVP trophy. "He's a leader, and the biggest thing about him is he's a competitor," Flowers said. "Kelvin Durham competes. He wants to win. And I think that's where I think we'll see some of the best things

from him is going to be on game day when he can push and show his competitive nature. But what he can do as a passer, as a runner, he's doing it, and he brings a lot to us." Durham also has the advantage of familiarity with Flowers' offensive philosophy and scheme. While some of the terminology has changed since the Fort Valley days, most of it is a matter of acclimation. "Most of the things are still the same," Durham said. "The biggest difference is he's changed some of the signals and some of the names of the plays. The Please see **JC SMITH** | 6A

Golden Bulls ninth in preseason national poll

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

For the first time ever, Johnson C. Smith is ranked in the preseason top 10 poll of Black college football teams. The Golden Bulls are ninth in the box-torow.com poll of HBCUs, one of three Division II programs in the rankings. JCSU, which finished third in the CIAA last year, finished the 2024 campaign ninth in the poll. Seventh-ranked Virginia Union joined JCSU as CIAA members in the media poll. Albany State of the Division II SIAC, is No. 10.

Jackson State, which finished the 2024 campaign atop the poll with 22 of 23 first-place votes, leads the preseason rankings, followed by South Carolina State, which lost to the Tigers in the Celebration Bowl and North Carolina Central, which finished second in the MEAC. The Bulldogs and Eagles were picked first and second in the MEAC preseason poll. Southern, which earned a first-place vote, and Florida A&M from the MEAC are ranked fourth and fifth, respectively, followed by Tennessee State of the Ohio Valley Conference. Alabama

State rounds out the Division I teams at No. 8. Reporters from around the country who cover HBCU football participate in the poll. Caldwell, Durham on watch list JCSU receiver Brevin Caldwell and quarterback Kelvin Durham are on the Deacon Jones Award watch list for the nation's top HBCU player. Caldwell, a three-year starter for the Golden Bulls, set school records for sin-



Caldwell

gle-season receptions (85) and receiving yards (1,090) in 2024. Durham, a transfer from Fort Valley State, tallied career passing highs in passing yards (2,096) and touchdowns (23) with the Wildcats in 2024. The watch list sponsored by the Black College Football Hall of Fame is composed of 50 players from Division I FCS and Division II. Four finalists will be announced after the season and the winner announced during halftime of the 2026 Allstate HBCU Legacy Bowl, on Feb. 21 in New Orleans.

West Charlotte leads preseason Magnificent Seven

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

The first Magnificent Seven high school football ranking opens the way 2024 ended. West Charlotte, the only public-school program in Mecklenburg County to win a state title last year, is No. 1. The Lions, who earned the 3A crown, have an experienced core and one of the state's best coaches in Sam Greiner to ease their transition to a new conference, the Meck Power Six 7A/8A. Second is Hough, which beat West Charlotte last year when both competed in the old Queen City 3A/4A, are poised to challenge the Lions in the new 8A ranks. Another former Queen City 3A/4A team, Mallard Creek, is third. The Mavericks will square off against West Charlotte in the Meck Power Six in a regular season test of strength. Independence, which is also in the MPS, is Please see **WEST CHARLOTTE** | 6A



West Charlotte High returns coach Sam Greiner and most of the core roster from the team that won the North Carolina 3A football title in 2024.

Rookies compete for time on the edge

By Jeff Hawkins
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

At his locker with his back to the room's visitors, Carolina Panthers rookie Princely Umanmielen sat hunched over, examining the box score of their 30-10 loss to the Cleveland Browns in the exhibition opener. A specific number corresponding to Nic Scourton shocked Umanmielen. The uber-competitive edge rusher couldn't believe his draft mate was credited with a sack. On which play? He couldn't immediately think of when Scourton put on a hit on Cleveland quarterback Shedeur Sanders behind the line of scrimmage. After being disrupted from his solitary stat-sheet study, Umanmielen rose to comment on his professional debut at Bank of America Stadium and assessment of the defense yielding 30 straight points. His attention soon turned to Scourton strolling past his locker. "One second," Umanmielen said, looking away. "Nic, you got a sack?" Scourton confirmed it. "The one where you pushed him out of bounds, that was a Please see **ROOKIES** | 6A

Kahlina saves and keeps Charlotte FC moving forward

By Steve Goldberg
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

If he were a less humble man, Kristijan Kahlina might wave a finger, Dikembe Mutombo style, at the attackers he just stymied with a spectacular save. But that's not who he is. The Croatian goalkeeper is the knight at the entrance to the bridge, the last line of defense for the castle, forbidding anyone threatening the throne. That's who Kahlina was when he guaranteed Charlotte would come home with at least a point against FC Cincinnati as they chase home advantage in the MLS playoffs. His effort gave Wilfried Zaha the opportunity for

the Crown to claim all three points with a top-quality volley inside the post in the 85th minute for a 1-0 win. It gave Charlotte a sweep against Cincinnati and marks the first six-game winning streak in team history. They are unbeaten in the last seven since a draw with Orlando and haven't lost in MLS play since June 28. Blue-collar Kahlina Kahlina plies his trade without vanity, a craftsman, a lunchpail blue-collar worker, who takes pride in his labor and brings full effort every time he clocks in. "Like every game, I just came here to perform," Kahlina said after the match. "I was

more (concerned with) myself on goalkeeping stuff, to prevent the goal, and thank God, I think the defensive shape, and how we played, it helped me that they don't have free time on the ball. I think it was one of the best games ever here." Charlotte coach Dean Smith has often said that Kahlina makes the saves he's supposed to, and some of the ones he's not. Even at 6-2 with his wingspan and quickness, keeping the ball out of the net is far from easy, and even the best - Kahlina was MLS Goalkeeper of the Year last season - find it challenging to always protect the 192 Please see **KAHLINA** | 6A

JC Smith reunion ‘a blessing’ for Durham

Continued from page 5A

standards are still the same, but some of the plays are different, but once I see the signal, I go back to my old memory.”

At JCSU, Durham takes the reins of an offense that will put more emphasis on the pass. The Golden Bulls went 8-2 last season with Darius Ocean turning in a career year in his first collegiate campaign as a starter, passing for a school record 2,301 yards and 16 touchdowns. Flowers is giving him the tools and opportunity to match or exceed those numbers.

“We did lead the CIAA in passing last year, and had the number one passer in the conference, but we also had, for 10 games, three rushers in the top 10, so, we expect to keep that type of balance going on,” Flowers said. “We were really about 55% pass, 45% run, and the biggest change you’ll probably see is we’ll probably be about 60% pass, 40% run, just because of the quarterback skill set and our receiving corps. ...

“It’s a deeper corps than we had last year, so because of that, we’re going to adjust accordingly, and the quarterback can handle it, the offense as a whole can handle it.”

The Golden Bulls are loaded at receiver, starting with two-time All-CIAA pick Brevin Caldwell returning for his senior campaign. Caldwell, an Ardrey Kell High graduate, set school single-season records with 85 catches for 1,090 yards – the first Golden Bull to smash the 1,000-yard receiving barrier.

JCSU added Armone Harris, who set Clark Atlanta single-season records for receptions (75), yards (1,004), and touchdowns (14) as the Panthers advanced to the SIAC title game. Deandre Proctor, who missed most of last season with an injury, returns.

“It’s definitely been a challenge coming from a run first offense to a passing offense, but my team has been nothing but a great help for me,” Durham said. “Working on off days, getting extra work in and just trying to learn those guys and how they run routes, where they want the ball and things like that. It’s been a great experience so far.”

The expectations are greater this year, too. JCSU was picked to finish second in the CIAA behind Virginia Union in the conference coaches’ preseason poll, and there’s the motivation of missing the 2024 title game – and likely the Division II playoffs – by losing their final two contests. Durham is new to campus, but Flowers believes he can deliver.

“It’s something when you have a veteran, a veteran starter that’s played in a lot of games,” Flowers said. “It’s different when that guy’s behind center.”

Durham embraces the stakes and an opportunity to make history.

“It’s really a privilege for guys to expect great things from our program,” he said. “I think we have the players, the coaching staff. We have everything we need. We’ve just got to put everything together and get to our common goal.”

Rookies fight for time on edge

Continued from page 5A

sack?” Umanmielen asked. “That’s what they were talking about?”

Scourton confirmed it. Umanmielen turned back around.

“That’s some [stuff],” he said, shaking his head with a grin.

Scourton’s sack came on a 3-and-13, second-quarter pass play. Scourton, a second-round draft pick, and Umanmielen, a third rounder, lined up on the edges of the Panthers’ 3-4 defense.

Sanders rolled out to his left, narrowly missing a sack attempt by Jaden Crumedy. As Sanders reversed field, Umanmielen stumbled over Crumedy. Meanwhile, Scourton fought through a double team and zeroed in on his target but missed. Sanders pivoted, juking away with a spin move.

Scourton didn’t give up, chasing Sanders across the field before pushing him out of bounds less than a yard behind the line of scrimmage, beating Umanmielen to his first professional sack.

“It’s all about competition,” Panthers defensive coordinator Ejiro Evero said. “That’s what (coach) Dave (Canales) preaches. Those two are just (like) everybody. We want com-

petition across the board.”

‘We’re just blessed’

Compiling two tackles and two pressures during eight pass-rushing attempts against the Browns, Scourton posted a 91.8 PFF grade, the defense’s highest mark.

Scourton brushed off the early accolades. The Panthers, after all, allowed 30 consecutive points to a fourth-string quarterback playing in his first pro game. He’s looking ahead, pointing to Pat Jones II and D.J. Wonnum for veteran leadership and guidance.

“We got lucky,” Scourton said. “To have two guys who understand we’re trying to go take their job, but want us to be better for the team, and want us to get better.

“We’re just blessed to have those two guys.”

Jones, a key offseason free-agent addition, and Wonnum, who entered training camp healthy, were listed as the first-team edge tandem on the second depth chart. Umanmielen and Scourton were paired on the second team.

General manager Dan Morgan’s personnel changes on the edge are expected to boost a defense that surrendered 534 points last season. A major reason for the injury-plagued unit surrendering the most points in league history

could be traced to the lack of generating consistent quarterback pressure. At just 32 sacks, the Panthers tied Tennessee for 29th in the league.

Newcomers reshape defense

Umanmielen and Scourton’s early bonding developed through their desire to compete.

During one of their initial interactions following rookie minicamp, the restless rookies led a small contingent to an empty hotel meeting room. Utilizing a few hotel employees and chairs, which served as opposing offensive linemen, the rookies practiced a series of plays, reviewing the Panthers’ playbook.

“We’re trying to be prepared for practice (Saturday), and that’s the type of guy (Umanmielen) is, and that’s the type of guy I am, and I’m excited to get to work with him,” Scourton said on May 10. “We had a couple of (hotel employees) in the room, and we’re like, ‘Are we good to be in here?’ And they’re like, ‘Yeah, you’re good, but what are y’all doing?’

“And we’re just like, ‘We’re going over plays.’”

Their extracurricular work continues, although Scourton was sidelined last week by a collapsed lung at the joint scrimmage with the Houston Texans.

« CHARLOTTE FC »

Kahlina saves the Crown

Continued from page 5A

square feet of a soccer goal. It will not always be their fault. Sometimes it will be as it was earlier this summer, when Kahlina was infected with the mistake bug that cursed Crown defenders.

But not this night.

Kahlina was credited with seven saves and most of them had Cincinnati players grasping their heads in frustrated amazement and despair.

• In the 22nd minute, Evander, FCC’s next-level Brazilian, takes a curling free kick about 25 yards straight out from the right side of the penalty area. It clears the wall of Zaha and Abada and looks to be successful on its mission to breach the near post, but Kahlina gets there to punch it away.

• Gerardo Valenzuela was eleven yards out, just right of the penalty spot, with the ball on his foot in the 40th minute and the whole left side of the goal inviting him to ripple it, only to see Kahlina leap to his right to get a big paw on it and push it wide.

• Four minutes later, Luca Orellano had a free kick on the right, similar to the angle that Kerwin Vargas scored against Monterrey from the left side. The left-footer hit a wicked inswinger that bent around the wall of Zaha and Abada and was targeted to go inside the near post, but Kahlina dove to push it away with both hands.

• 50th minute. Ender Echenique gets around Bill Tuiloma, who pulled up with a left hamstring strain, down the left side and drives right at Kahlina from the corner of the 6-yard box extended with malice on his mind as he opens his hips and tries to bully a right-footed shot from 3 yards away past Kahlina, who blocks it with his left shoulder.

• With less than a minute left of added time at game’s end, Evander loops a free kick from about 30 yards out, and about 10 yards from the center, over Charlotte’s defensive line at the 18.

Gerardo Valenzuela got past Tim Ream and lunged to get a foot on it, but Kahlina came up with a kick save.

“It’s up and down, and I am (just) part of the team,” Kahlina said. “You need to go forward and doing right things. Train well. Give your maximum and then wait until one game like this one, and everything will go like good way for us. For sure, my confidence will be bigger, and it’s really nice to have a game like this.”

When a goalkeeper is on his game, as Kahlina, 33, has been, it emboldens and lifts the spirit of the defenders in front of him. When his distribution of the ball is smart, it creates offensive opportunities.

It should not be ignored that David Bingham has proven himself a worthy backup

to the Great Wall of Kahlina. He’s started six matches across all competitions, including two against Toronto, a 2-0 win, and Philadelphia, a 2-1 loss, when Smith rested Kahlina.

Bingham, 35, conceded two goals against the Union but kept a clean sheet against the Canadian club. He made nine saves in both games with a save percentage of 81.8%. Kahlina’s save percentage is 71% in regular season games and was 76.6% in last year’s Goalkeeper of the Year season.

After Kahlina started in a bad loss to FC Juarez in the first Leagues Cup match, Bingham got the call against Chivas and Monterrey and again allowed two goals in one game and a shutout in the next. He was the star of the 2024 Leagues Cup game against Cruz Azul, winning the tiebreaker with his saves. He also started U.S. Open Cup matches this year.

Unexpected news

Which makes it all the odder when the news broke Tuesday that CLTFC was reportedly bringing Inter Miami FC goalkeeper Drake Callendar in during the summer transfer window.

According to Tom Bogert of GiveMeSport, “Charlotte FC have agreed a deal to acquire goalkeeper Drake Callendar from Inter Miami, per sources. Callendar, surprised by destination and wasn’t consulted in the process, sources add.”

The primary keeper for Inter for the past three seasons, with 89 starts, 32 last year, has only seen the pitch in five games this year as 39-year-old Argentine keeper Oscar Ustari has taken over in net for the Flamingos with 20 starts across all competitions. Rocco Rios Novo has taken the backup spot with three starts in six matches, all coming in the Leagues Cup first Phase.

The 27-year-old’s last regular-season start was April 27 against Dallas, where he surrendered four goals. Callendar underwent successful surgery to repair a sports hernia on May 9. He was a nominee for MLS Goalkeeper of the Year in 2022.

The question is who will be moving out of Charlotte’s keeper carousel. Are other teams looking at Kahlina, who is signed through December 2026, as a transfer target this summer?

According to the MLS Players Association, Kahlina has guaranteed compensation at just over \$788,000 this season. Callendar is listed at \$456,000, so this is no small deal. That’s starting keeper money.

Both Bingham and Charlotte’s number three keeper, George Marks, who have contracts expiring on Dec. 31, are listed at \$104,000. Chituru Odunze, who has just come back from injury, will earn just over \$117,000 and is contracted through 2027.

« MAGNIFICENT SEVEN »

West Charlotte tops preseason

Continued from page 5A

fourth, followed by Charlotte Catholic, which moves to a new conference as a 6A competitor.

Palisades, which advanced to the playoffs for the first time in the school’s fourth year, is sixth, followed by Butler, giving the MPS four teams in the Magnificent Seven. The ranking is for Mecklenburg programs that play in public school conferences.

Teams are ranked in order with 2024 record and playoff result:

1. West Charlotte (13-2, NC 3A title). The Lions are moving up to the new 8A ranks but have the roster and depth to do damage when tournament time rolls around. If there’s an area of concern, it’s special teams where the Lions aren’t nearly as stout when it comes to kicking.
2. Hough (12-2, fourth round of 4A playoffs). The Huskies created a stellar sandwich of 12 straight wins after a season-opening loss to Rock Hill Northwestern, which won South Carolina’s 4A title. Hough dragged everyone in the old Queen City 3A/4A, but failing to make the North Carolina final was a letdown. Can coach DeShawn Baker get Hough over the hump in 8A?
3. Mallard Creek (10-3, third round of 4A playoffs). The Mavericks have a challenging nonconference schedule on the front end and rugged conference slate in the back. The good news is a successful start gives everyone an idea of what to expect from coach Kennedy Tinsley’s squad.

4. Independence (10-2, second round of 4A playoffs). The Patriots are winning with regularity – at least in the regular season – which is a tribute to coach D.J. McFadden’s skill. The playoffs, however, is still a challenge, as indicated by last year’s 47-3 loss to Hough. Residing in the Meck Power Six 7A/8A with West Charlotte and Mallard Creek will bring out the best in, or expose, the Patriots.
5. Charlotte Catholic (9-3, third round of 4A playoffs). The Cougars are moving up to 6A as a member of the Southern Carolina 6A/7A, where they should be a threat to advance at least to the West final. A non-conference tussle with independent power Providence Day as well as a 2024 4A playoff rematch against conference rival Porter Ridge (now in 7A) and state powerhouse Weddington (also 7A) highlight the schedule.
6. Palisades (8-4, second round of 4A playoffs). Jonathan Simmons coached the Pumas to their first postseason berth and have a good core of returning players back for 2025. That experience bodes well in the Southwestern Athletic Conference, where Palisades is the only squad with a plus-.500 record from 2024.
7. Butler (4-7, missed the playoffs). Brian Hales is back after a year’s retirement and his job is to return the Bulldogs to a more competitive state. We’ll find out quickly with Irmo (S.C.) and Providence Day on the nonconference schedule before jumping into the Meck Power Six fray.

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