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THE REAL DEAL PRESS

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Report and Analysis

PolicyBridge casts critical eye on local black leadership

New report asks: "where are the leaders in the African American community?"



By R. T. Andrews
EDITOR

PolicyBridge, the nonpartisan, black-led research and advocacy organization that conducts research and reports on public policy issues of import to Cleveland's African American community, has stepped into the deep end with its most recent report, released just this past week, on the parlous state of black leadership.

The report, written by PolicyBridge co-founder and board chair Randell McShepard, identifies four categories of leadership and identifies seven traits that should form a litmus

test for emerging community and civic leaders.

One of the seven traits is courage, and McShepard must be credited with that for putting a bullseye on his back with the issuance of the report, which can be found [online here](#).

The strength of the report lies in part in the questions it asks and what those questions imply without actually stating, which dampens their incendiary nature. For example, the introductory section asks, "Where are the leaders of the African American community and what tactics might they employ to win the respect and confidence of their peers?"

A fair inference from that question is that there is a large leadership void in the black community and that those who might be considered among the leaders do not have sufficient respect and confidence of their peers.

"No surprise, Sherlock," might be the response. The critical deficiencies implied by the question are an open secret in the black community. But few dare say it publicly. Some fear offending thin-skinned politicians, others consider it airing dirty linen, and still others are just resigned to how things are in the belief that change is unlikely.

Truth is, many people outside the black community observe the same absence of effective local black leadership. Further, they understand the drag force that places upon our community and region. Of course, many of those same outside observers act on the regular to mitigate against the development of authentic black community leadership. Typically, they seek first to suppress, gently at first, forcefully if necessary.

If authentic black leadership

Continued on Page 4

New owner for iconic Academy Tavern

He and his mother, late Judge Butler, were longtime fans of Larchmere landmark



By R. T. Andrews
EDITOR

Chris Butler is the new owner of the Academy Tavern. He bought the business on May 31 and took over operations effective June 3.

In a brief interview in the sunny enclosed courtyard at the rear of the restaurant, Butler described his role more as

Continued on Page 2

New owner for iconic Academy Tavern

Continued from Page 1

curator than owner of the neighborhood tavern that he has long admired. He is thoroughly familiar with the place and the neighborhood, having grown up on the same street barely two blocks away.

The links between Butler's family and the quintessential neighborhood restaurant run deeper than just geography. He went to high school with the seller's children, although that was a few years before Sam Gantous bought the business in 1997. Butler graduated from Shaker HS in 1991.

Gantous was only the fourth owner of the business, which dates back to 1939, just a few years after the end of Prohibition. A neighborhood anchor, the Academy Tavern has long

enjoyed a loyal patronage that included a healthy mix of professionals, academics, and blue-collar types. Fittingly, the tavern has long served as the kind of place where first timer visitors were as comfortable as locals who could track their patronage in scores of years.

That family feel extended to the staff as well. Lisa, a senior member of the wait crew, told us her daughter was married to a former colleague's grandson. That colleague, Julie, had worked at the tavern for 42 years before her retirement.

Butler, an independent musician and SAG-affiliated actor by profession, had been working to finalize the deal for about a year. He and his mother, Annette Butler, a long-

time assistant US attorney and former judge, had been actively negotiating the purchase prior to her final illness. [She died December 31.](#)

Butler sees the Academy as "a great neighborhood tavern," a "Cleveland staple". While he is developing plans to expand its entertainment offerings to include some original music by local artists, he emphasized his intent to cater to long-established regulars, saying he wants "the regulars to come more regularly". To that end, he says the venerable and versatile pianist George Foley

will continue to perform every Wednesday from 7 to 9p.

Jessica Murr has been brought on as Academy general manager. She brings with her a 20-year resume in the service industry, including six years' experience as a manager of McCarthy's in the Flats, and "lots of other places".

Butler has made one subtle change to the place already, one that might have gone unnoticed until he mentioned it. A picture of his mother, dating to her tenure as president of The Cleveland City Club, now graces the front entrance.

Kirby V. Freeman

Banking/Financial Services Consultant

kirbyvfreeman@gmail.com
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PolicyBridge casts critical eye on local black leadership

Continued from Page 1

emerges nonetheless, the next steps are cooptation and management via designated gatekeepers.

Those true black leaders who make it through that crucible while maintaining their identity and integrity without sacrificing the interests of those they set out to represent — Carl Stokes remains the best though by no means the only example — emerge with the respect of those they had to fight all the way to the table.

The PolicyBridge report, aptly named “Missing in Action”, usefully considers the issue of black leadership in four categories: Political Leadership, Business Leadership, Community Leadership, and Civic Leadership. The chief difference between the latter two categories is one of scale. Community refers to the neighborhood or affinity groups or associations, churches, and the like. Civic looks to the larger arena, where money, power, and establishment norms generally hold sway.

Throughout his discussion, McShepard is gently pointing out the dearth of young or emerging black leadership, the implied fault of older established black leaders. In part he is no doubt channeling the lessons learned and battles fought in his own rise to a position of prominence. After all, he was once audacious enough to start PolicyBridge without kissing a bunch of political rings.

His report identifies essential ingredients of would be leaders as earned credibility, subject matter expertise, a track record of success, courage and autonomy as core desirable elements for emerging leaders.

We commend McShepard and PolicyBridge for the report. It is clearly past time for the black community to address the issues he identifies. But in doing so, the

oft-quoted adage of Frederick Douglass is as much a factor inside the black community as without: “Power concedes nothing without demand.” Black elders are no more likely to step aside for their successors than white power wielders are eager to give way to black ones.

The true challenge for Cleveland’s black community is to develop a culture that looks to be inclusive as opposed to “I got mine”. There are literally thousands of black people in our community who routinely lend a helping hand to their fellows, but they do so against a backdrop that is often hostile to such instincts. When we as a community develop a culture that embraces collective advancement and rewards those Nguzo Saba principles all 365 days and not just during Kwanzaa, stifling emergent leadership will cease to be a major issue.

To a significant degree, the problems that retard growth and development in Cleveland’s black community mirror the problems in Greater Cleveland’s inner sanctums of corporate, business, political, civic, and philanthropic communities. To an unfortunate but predictable and even intentional degree, Cleveland’s black community wades in a kiddie pool that mimics the closed, top-down hierarchical structure that controls and retards Northeast Ohio.

That is why some most of the report’s recommendations unfortunately misplace reliance upon [some] “area philanthropic organizations, the Greater Cleveland Partnership and the Mayor’s Office ...”

Mandela’s guards did not free him. He freed himself, and then he freed his guards. Then they let him loose.

So, who wants to continue this discussion? We offer this space.

THE **REAL DEAL**
PRESS

Reporting on the interplay of race, class and power in the civic, business and cultural spaces of Northeast Ohio and beyond.

Our mission is to attract, articulate and amplify civic intelligence and community engagement for a healthier, stronger community.

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Submit letters, press releases, notices, calendar items, and corrections via email at rta@TheRealDealPress.com or fax 216.672.4304.

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Publisher & Editor: R.T. Andrews

Layout & Design: Steve Aresmon Thomas

Contributing Writers: Marilyn Dyson, Kirby V. Freeman, David Miller, Nathan Paige, Lewis Rice.

The Real Deal Press

☎ 216.672.4301

✉ rta@TheRealDealPress.com

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QUOTE of the Week
“We are the first true victims of identity theft”
 — Dr. Gina Paige, President and Co-Founder of AfricanAncestry.com

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Glenville's East Side Market opens at East 105 Street and St. Clair Ave.



Pictured above, along with two neighborhood residents, are, L-R: Cleveland councilman Anthony Hairston, NEON officials Karen Butler and Willie F. Austin, councilman Kevin Conwell, Cleveland mayor Frank Jackson, Bratenahl Village mayor John Licastro, councilman Mike Polensek, and developer Arthur Fayne.

The official grand opening of East Side Market at East 105 St. and St. Clair Ave. on May 23 signaled the end of at least one huge food desert on Cleveland's east side.

The long-awaited event, enabled by the leadership of Northeast Ohio Neighborhood Health Services [NEON] in partnership with the city of Cleveland, PNC Bank, local companies and grocery entrepreneur Brad Rosselot, pioneers a unique concept that couples a full service grocery store, NEON's eighth, community-based, primary care health and wellness center, and a third business, 4K Programs – nonprofit – offering customized programming aimed at enriching body, mind and spirit for overall well-being. Collectively, the three businesses comprise what promoters say is the city's first healthy living urban center.

LifeCycles



Hired

Lomond Elementary Principal **Carina Freeman** is leaving Shaker Heights Schools to become a Network Support Leader in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, effective July 1.



Resigned

Marcella Brown, as executive director, BPACF [Black Professionals Association Charitable Foundation]



Earned

Tim Goler, Ph.D. in Sociology, Case Western Reserve University.



Elected

Brian Siggers, Jr., to president, Northeast Ohio Young Black Democrats.

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Councilman Kevin Conwell and Famicos Foundation invite community residents to join us at the official opening of the **Greater Cleveland Fisher Houses**, providing a home for veteran's families to stay together while receiving treatment at the Louis Stokes VA Medical Center.



Joint Bar Associations of Color 2019 Summer Social



Several dozen lawyers gathered June 5 after work June 5 for a bar associations mixer in Heinen's balcony wine section at Ninth St. and Euclid Ave. Among them [Clockwise from top left]:

Cameron Buck, 2d from left, a summer

intern from Boston University School of Law, gets the lowdown on practicing law in Cleveland from attorneys Bradley Ouambo, left; Gregory Guice, center; Mia Garcia, and Jameson Tibbs.

Bar association presidents Patrick Es-

pinosa, Hispanic Bar Association; Valissa Howard, Norman S. Minor Bar Association; Ruchi V. Asher, Asian American Bar Association; and Neil Bhagat, South Asian Bar Association.

Marlon Primes, president of the

Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association, giving the legal lowdown to a newly-minted attorney, who is moving to Cleveland this month.

Attorneys Renée Bacchus and Crystal Williamson enjoying the scene.

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